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# CONTENTS

The Gentle Art of the Resounding Put-Down
*Aristides* 311

The Idea of Tradition in American Art Criticism
*Hilton Kramer* 319

Deep Red: The International Debt Crisis and Its Historical Precedents
*Harold James* 331

Tot Sociology: Or What Happened to History in the Grade Schools
*Diane Ravitch* 343

Remembering Jacques Maritain
*Wallace Fowlie* 355

Album of the Knopfs
*Stanley Kauffmann* 371

Portrait of Justus Lipsius
*Anthony Grafton* 382

What Ranke Meant
*Felix Gilbert* 393

Cowboy
*John P. Sisk* 400

Letter from Madrid: A View from the Street
*Thomas Swick* 407

**POETRY**

THE MARY ELINORE SMITH POETRY PRIZE
The Right Way to Escape from a Sinking Ship
*Michael Spence* 328

Marcus Aurelius, *Joan Aleshire*, 330; Waiting, *Jane O. Wayne*, 342; Correct Blinking, *Jean Hollander*, 367; After the Fact, *Elizabeth Libbey*, 369; The Steeple, *John Dickson*, 391; Rembrandt Prepares for a Walk Along the Amstel River *and* A Farmstead with a Hayrick and Weirs Beside a Stream, *Thomas Carper*, 398; From a Photograph, *Don Stap*, 406; History, *Jay Parini*, 414

**BOOKS**

F. Scott Fitzgerald's Little Drinking Problem
*Julie M. Irwin* 415

Reviews
*Douglas Clayton, John Wauck, Lawrence Lipking, Andy Stark, Michael Burns, Heinz R. Kuehn* 427

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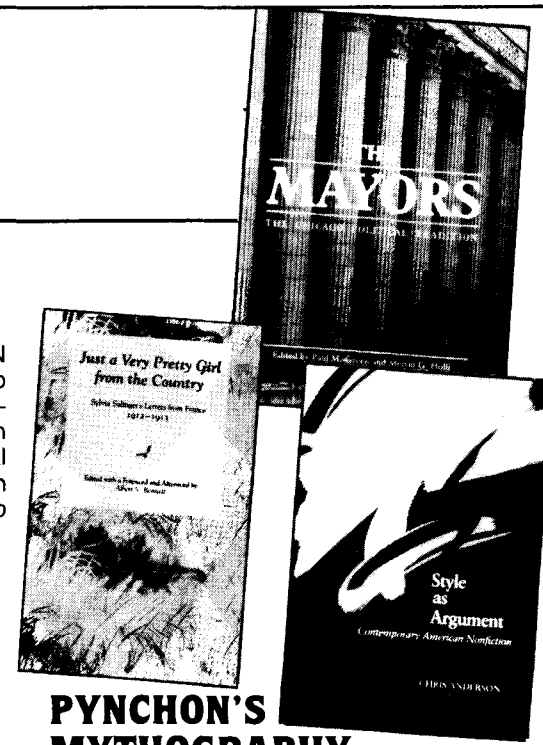


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# *Life and Letters* . . . . . .

## The Gentle Art of the Resounding Put-Down

ARISTIDES

There I sit, calm as you please, about to lay into a nicely underdone and ample portion of leg of lamb in an expensive and quite good restaurant called Jean-Louis at the Watergate for which a large organization is to pay what in my youth in Chicago used to be called "the damages," when the young woman seated next to me inquires after the salt. I search for a salt shaker among the plate and crystal, flowers and candles, but none is to be found. A small oversight, doubtless. I ask our waiter, a tall and rather well-set-up fellow, for salt for our table, and, in a somewhat dubious foreign accent, he replies, "I am sorry, sir, but Jean-Louis does not permit salt at the table." If I were quicker than I am, I should have replied, "Very well, then, bring us a bottle of chili sauce." If I were cleverer, I should have repaired to a public telephone, there to order a pizza to be delivered to me at table in time for the arrival of Jean-Louis's dessert. But on this occasion, as on many another, I was neither quick nor clever enough. When told that Jean-Louis does not permit salt at the table, I replied, in italics, "*Oh*," my face, I rather suspect, matching the lamb upon my plate.

My condition reminded me of a skit that the comedian Danny Thomas used to do in which he played a little man who is told off by his boss, or a bureaucrat, or his mother-in-law, and somewhat mousily takes it. But as soon as his tormentor departs, scores of brilliant, even excoriating responses occur to him. Contemplating his recent degradation, the little man, doing a slow burn that heats up fast, says, "Why, I should've said to him, I should've said . . . ," and then there issues from him a cascade of funny remarks, each more devastating than the one that preceded it, and the only appropriate response to which would be for his tormentor, were he still on the premises, to beg forgiveness before finding a tidy way to take his life. Then, as I recall, the boss, or bureaucrat, or mother-in-law returns, and our man, so courageously witty when alone, once more turns into a Milquetoast.

I am by no means the Mittyesque figure of Danny Thomas's imagining, but, I must confess, I have spent my share of time in the activity that I think of as malign afterthought. Although I seem to be able to write my mind fairly well, I have not always spoken it with the same ease and confidence. Part of the problem may be insufficient quickness; even when it comes to insults, I need to revise and polish. Part of the problem, too, is that I don't have much appetite for face-to-face confrontation, at least not confrontation of a combative kind. I don't wish to imply natural sweetness of temper. I don't mind expressing my dissatisfaction at egregiously bad service, or hopeless bureaucratic snaggle, or the attempt on the part of someone to deal unfairly with me, but usually I go a bit too far, my gorge rises too quickly, I waste wit on someone who turns out not to know English well, or I blast someone else for some mishap in terms that would be more appropriate for telling off, say, Hermann Göring.

But, to return to my man Jean-Louis, permit me to make a quick paranoia check. Ought I to have been insulted by Jean-Louis's desalinization program? I do not think an insult was intended. Certainly there was nothing personal about it; I, after all, didn't require any salt, but found the food splendid as it came to the table. No, I took it, if not as a personal insult, then as a strong gesture—even, it does not seem to me going too far to say, a somewhat bullying gesture—that called for a strong response. When a chef tells you, in effect, that his food is so perfectly prepared that only a man with an aluminum palate could possibly need to add salt to it, well, in



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my view, that chef should have something said to him that is direct and a bit peppery.

"Don't make a scene," a voice of reason calls out at such moments. "Ah, but it was not you who set this scene," another, rather more aggressive voice responds. I used to hate what people of my parents' generation call "making a scene." I do not love doing so now. But with the passing of years, and the acquisition of greater confidence (or is it the simple loss of tact?), my feeling is that certain scenes are unavoidable, some absolutely cry out to be played, and still others are eluded only at the cost of self-contempt. Lots of rudeness, nastiness, touchiness in the world; it's all part, I fear, of city living. So when a cab driver attempts to cheat me on a fare, or an academic behaves snobbishly, or a person in a position of temporary power over me acts badly, I take a deep breath, exhale slowly, and to myself mutter, "Ready when you are, C.B."

As in another age one needed to know how to wield a weapon if one traveled the highways, so today one needs to acquire the ability to wield the put-down if one is to be assured reasonably safe passage in the contemporary world. Many of us doubtless prefer to think otherwise—to think that good manners and goodwill shall win the day. Yet wasn't Santayana correct when he wrote: "In solitude it is possible to love mankind; in the world, for one who knows the world, there can be nothing but secret or open war." Detached philosopher that he was, practitioner of old-world courtesies that he also was, Santayana knew and understood the need for the put-down in modern life. The put-down is, of course, an imaginative insult, and Santayana, in his autobiography, confessed to having a strong taste in this line; and he even noted: "The habit of scribbling mocking epigrams has accompanied me through life and invaded the margins of my most serious authors."

As an admirer of Santayana, it pleased me enormously to learn this, for I, too, have this habit, and sometimes go about in a perfectly jolly mood formulating what I think are imaginative insults. When I learned that the literary critic Harold Bloom claimed, in *Time* magazine, to be able to read one thousand pages an hour, for example, it occurred to me to ask, What possible value can this have, except to permit one to read everything that Harold Bloom has written in fewer than two hours? Reading yet another interview with the novelist Philip Roth, I thought that over the years Roth has made himself into more and more of a minor writer, but without one of the principal charms of the minor writer: modesty. Formulating put-downs when alone may seem an odd activity for a man of middle years, but it does pass the time.

As put-downs go, these aren't bad, but they do suffer from not having been delivered in person. Malice formulated in tranquility is art of a lower kind than that exercised, so to speak, on site. I do not think of myself as slow-witted, but I do, apparently, need time to compose. It wasn't always thus. Although the term *put-down* had not yet been invented, the activity was widely practiced among the adolescent boys with whom I grew up on the far north side of Chicago. I hope I do not seem unduly vain—"duly vain," I will settle for—when I say that, in the realm of put-downs, I was one of the fastest guns in the West (Rogers Park area). Where I grew up, wit was valued much more than learning; in the list of masculine virtues, wit followed only physical courage and athletic prowess. In those days, with a tongue quicker than an iguana's, I could destroy a bully in under thirty words, leaving him stammering in his own verbal ineptitude. In its way, it was a feeling of power.

Which reminds me to ask if the perfectly aimed put-down isn't the civilized person's equivalent of the perfectly aimed knockout punch. Perhaps "civilized person" isn't the precise phrase; "smallish person," by which I mean physically small, may be more precise. I read somewhere not long ago that the preponderant number of poisoners have been small men, and I am inclined to think that the same applies to the preponderant number of put-down artists. When I think over the history of insult, the splendid put-down artists seem mostly to have been smallish men and women, of the general size and frame of Dorothy Parker and Evelyn Waugh. The only notable exception that comes to mind is Oscar Wilde, whom I have always assumed to be more than six feet tall. Generally, though, the best height for a put-down artist is somewhere between 5′ 5″ and 5′ 10″ for a man, 5′ and 5′ 4″ for a woman. Delicate work calls for a delicate touch, and too much bulk can only get in the way.



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As for bulk, I have often tried to imagine how different my own life would have been—and would continue to be—if I were, say, a foot taller and seventy or so pounds heavier. If so, when in a traffic jam the man in the car behind my own who presses his heavy hand on his horn might be subjected to something more than my privately formulated put-downs—"Your low intelligence, sir, is only exceeded by your high boorishness"—which he will never have to hear anyway. But if I were 6′ 7″ or so, I think I might, in such a circumstance, be inclined to put on my emergency brake, slip out from behind the steering wheel, and have a word or two with the gentleman on what the late President Eisenhower called "a person-to-person basis." Or I might cut out the middleman—in this case, the English language—and instead hold him aloft for a spell, shaking him gingerly to determine if his upper and lower teeth are making good contact with each other. Better, perhaps, not to have that additional foot.

A certain portliness, however, does not seem out of place in a put-down artist. It lends ballast and can make one seem vaguely menacing, a person clearly not to be trifled with. Among Englishmen, Maurice Bowra, Evelyn Waugh, and the older Kingsley Amis all had (in Amis's case, still have) good put-down weight. So did Edmund Wilson, who had not the lightness of touch required of the supreme put-down artist but who, through conveying a general atmosphere of belligerence, could make plain that he was not a man who took kindly to being put down. Still, in these matters the best defense remains a strong offense, and no one could be more offensive, in an artful way, than Evelyn Waugh.

As the armadillo is built for defense, so was Waugh for offense. He even put his deafness (which some people believed he exaggerated) to good purpose by acquiring an ear trumpet, which caused anyone who wished to speak to him to feel he had to speak very loudly in his presence—and it is difficult to be clever let alone subtle when practically shouting. Once, at a banquet in Waugh's honor, when Malcolm Muggeridge rose to speak in tribute to him, Waugh, sitting upon the raised dais, rather emphatically removed his ear trumpet, setting it well in front of him, a gesture that made it all too plain that Muggeridge could not possibly say anything worth hearing. Yet this is rather crude when set beside Waugh's powers of incisive formulation, a brief sample of which is his remark to the effect that, now that the Church no longer defrocks priests for sodomy, it is impossible to get decent proofreading.

Why would someone wish to say anything so outrageous? Chiefly, I should guess, because it happens to be terribly funny—that is, if you don't happen to be a liberal cleric, a homosexual, or in publishing. Without the wit, of course, such sentiments would be construed as deeply insulting, not to say bigoted. One is no longer permitted straight-out insults in contemporary society, at least not in public, if only because it is no longer clear how a straight-out insult ought to be dealt with. To cite a personal instance, as a result of an editorial contretemps, I once had an author accuse me of nothing less than "moral cowardice," which I felt pushed the stakes up too high too fast, for all it left me in the way of a return was open conjecture about his mother's profession. Instead I wrote back suggesting a duel when next he was in town. So far I have heard nothing further from him.

An insult is a blatant, coarse, ugly thing. "You emanate hopelessness and resentment and boredom and death," says a woman to her husband in Kingsley Amis's novel *The Old Devils*. Earlier she had addressed herself to his physical repulsiveness. Such insults don't leave a man much. A put-down at least gives its target a fighting chance. Thus George Bernard Shaw once sent Winston Churchill two tickets for the opening night of one of his new plays, noting, "Bring a friend—if you have one"; to which Churchill wrote back to say that he was otherwise engaged opening night, but would appreciate tickets for the second performance—"if there is one." What makes a put-down an insult with imagination is its high style; a put-down is an insult delivered with style. It is only the force of style that permits even the most outrageous put-down to elude the charge of pettiness, bad taste, or viciousness.

Saying something well may not be the best revenge, but it tends to be the most effective revenge. It can also be a reasonably enduring revenge. A serious put-down is under the obligation not only to sting but to leave a scar—that is, to be memorable. As Jorge Luis Borges remarks in his all-too-brief essay "The



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Art of Verbal Abuse," a put-down (he does not use this term) is an exercise in wrath and not in reason. Yet a winning put-down is wrath under absolute control, using whatever methods—irony, hyperbole, understatement—are at one's disposal, and not sticking around to talk logic. "My prayer to God is a very short one," wrote Voltaire. " 'O Lord, make my enemies ridiculous.' God has granted it." No, what God granted was the power of style to Voltaire, who used it to make them appear so through eternity.

In a better world, the need for put-downs would vanish, and skill at this deadly art would be equivalent in its utility to skill today with the net and trident. But until such a world arrives—and no time of arrival is yet listed, no gate posted—the art of the put-down remains, well, I would not say indispensable but highly useful. At the same time, this art of verbal abuse must not itself be abused through over-use. To have the reputation for being too strong in this line is not, I think, on the whole advisable, though Alexander Pope, one of the best in the business, clearly reveled in his own high reputation as a verbal killer:

> Yes, I am proud; and must be proud, to see
> Men not afraid of God afraid of me.

Such a boast set up its own natural rejoinder, and in a bit of put-down Ping-Pong, Lord Hervey, whom Pope had cut up in "An Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot," picked up a paddle and shot back:

> The great honour of that boast is such
> That hornets and mad dogs may boast as much.

Samuel Johnson said of Pope that "he hardly drank tea without a strategem," a thing of which no one would ever have accused Johnson, who lowered the boom, my guess is, without rehearsal and whenever the mood was upon him. Shouldn't have liked to have been Boswell when Johnson served up the following put-down to him: "Sir, you have but two topics, yourself and me. I am sick of both." Posterity, or at least that part of it that remains interested in bookish things, has of course grown sick of neither. Yet I am reminded of my recently telling a young literary journalist, whose interview and portrait of a contemporary novelist had been rejected by a magazine, that, apart from the loss of the fee, perhaps it was just as well. "What do you want to be a Boswell for," I said, "in an age without any Johnsons?" As put-downs of an age go, that isn't too bad, but I have to admit that it wasn't altogether spontaneous. I had thought it a number of times before, folded it away, and now unfurled it in the breeze of this particular conversation.

Yet it is the spontaneous put-down, the well-turned jibe that rolls off on the spur of the moment and meets the opportunity exactly, that seems to me most impressive. A truly spontaneous put-down artist resembles the gunfighter in his need for speedy response. Such an artist must not only have wit but have ready wit. Your second-line put-down artists—among whom, perhaps rather generously, I am inclined to place myself—keep a certain amount of material stored up for use when needed. Your first-line artist, however, is inspired by the moment or occasion and lets the chips, chaps, and slaps fall where they may. I once introduced a British journalist to a friend of mine who, upon introduction, complimented the journalist on his past writings, but added that he was sorry to learn that the journalist had recently declared himself a socialist and asked how this had come about. "Very simple," said the journalist. "I happened to hear Michael Harrington lecture in Chicago." "Hmmm," said my friend, "Michael Harrington lecturing in Chicago—surely a case of worst comes to worst." There it was; one shot and you could hear at least three bodies fall.

Not all put-downs are best delivered face-to-face. Some are too cruel to deliver before their targets, lest they maim them psychologically for life. Some come up by the way and are not the result of any dramatic encounter. A friend of mine once concluded a general attack on a rather well known sociologist by saying, "Well, at least he has never taken undue advantage of being Jewish"—the point here being that the target of this attack, though indeed Jewish, has kept that fact fairly well hidden throughout a long career. A story is told about two women, one of whom reports to the other that a particularly dull newspaper columnist is supposed to marry a famous and beautiful movie actress, causing the second woman to remark, "I suppose I'd rather sleep



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with him than actually have to read him"—which seems to me as rough a put-down of a writer as I have heard. I once heard someone describe a man who had only recently walked away after what appeared a friendly enough exchange as "obviously suffering from delusions of equality," which would have been vicious, even delivered out of earshot of the victim, had not the latter himself been a great snob. The force of the slap in the face, the French philosopher Alain said, is best registered by the one who receives it, yet these behind-the-back put-downs are slaps delivered but never received.

Does the taste for put-downs—not enjoying hearing them but actually delivering them—imply a certain appetite for the jugular, a certain surliness, perhaps a meanness of spirit? Horace Walpole said of Samuel Johnson that he "made the most brutal speeches to living persons; for though he was good-natured at bottom, he was ill-natured at top." Some put-down artists seem to be motivated chiefly by a kind of self-defensive petulance (Dorothy Parker, S. J. Perelman), some by an enthusiasm for destructive criticism (Mary McCarthy, Dwight Macdonald), some by simple anger at shoddiness, fraudulence, falsity generally (fill in your own candidates here). Some are menthol cool in their disdain, some red-hot in their rage; some are amused by the folly of their targets, some are outraged in their hatred. At a minimum, all, I believe it can safely be said, tend to concur that the world is in need of a few adjustments.

Gertrude Stein announced—Gertrude Stein never merely "said" anything—that "remarks are not literature," and yet literature is studded with splendid remarks, many of them fine put-downs. Many of Oscar Wilde's best put-downs occur in his plays, though two of my favorites—his remark about George Meredith being "a prose Browning, and so is Browning" and his remark that Bernard Shaw "hasn't an enemy in the world, and none of his friends like him"—do not. In "Him with His Foot in His Mouth," Saul Bellow has a narrator-hero who, seemingly out of sheer playfulness, cannot resist the impulse to let fly with put-downs, often when they are quite uncalled-for and even when they work against his own best interests. In Kingsley Amis's novels there is a general crackle of put-down in the air, relieved only by occasional flashes of genuine bad feeling. Ah, me, I believe I have just committed a put-down of my own, and I rather like Kingsley Amis's novels. Must be careful not to get too much into the spirit of my subject.

Name-dropping is generally a form of one-upmanship (itself a variant of put-downmanship), but there are some who have not minded being put down by people of sufficient fame. About a most rambunctious homosexual member of Parliament named Tom Driberg, Winston Churchill reportedly said, "He is the man who brought pederasty into disrepute." Driberg is supposed to have been rather proud of this remark; he was, after all, put down by no less a figure than the greatest political leader of the twentieth century. The poet John Frederick Nims, a man with a lovely, sly sense of humor, once told me that, while visiting Bernard Berenson at I Tatti, he was asked by his host what he was doing in Europe. Nims explained that he was on a Fulbright Fellowship to lecture on contemporary poetry. "Oh," replied Berenson, "you mean that squiggly stuff." There are limits, though. I shouldn't at all care to be the subject of a Vladimir Nabokov put-down, especially of the not-at-all-witty but quite efficient kind he dealt out to Norman Mailer by way of a journalist for *Time:* "I detest everything in American life that he stands for."

To be put down by one's putative inferiors can be a more complicated affair. Max Beerbohm told a story about his efforts to win the regard of the rather elegant hall porter at the Athenaeum Club. Then one day he left at the club a rare copy of a brochure his friend Logan Pearsall Smith's mother had written entitled *How Little Logan Was Brought to Jesus,* which Smith had given him to read for his amusement. Beerbohm didn't want the lofty hall porter to think he read such stuff, yet, the copy of the brochure being so rare, he had no choice but to try to rescue it. With some trepidation, he asked the porter if anyone had found the brochure, whose title he had to report to the porter. A few days later the porter returned the brochure to him in a wrapped and tied package. Beerbohm felt he had forever after lost status in the hall porter's eyes, and that the fact that the brochure was wrapped as it was, suggesting that no serious person would want it known he read such drivel, itself constituted a powerful put-down.



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Max Beerbohm had social antennae too sensitive to mistake the intent of such a gesture. But with only a touch of paranoia in one's makeup one can discover intent to put down everywhere. Often there is no question. Years ago I recall meeting an acquaintance from army days; he was twenty-seven, Jewish, and unmarried. He told me that he had just gone to the wedding of a nineteen-year-old female cousin at which he was seated at the children's table—a gesture in which he discovered dissatisfaction at his unmarried state of a kind that constituted a strong general put-down. More recently I attended a gala at which many a political celebrity was present; a big-city mayor, a United States senator, a couple of ambassadors, the current secretary of state. The number of security men almost equaled the number of guests. At my own table there were no politicians, but instead musicians, writers, and critics; I found it delightful. A few days later it was reported to me that someone had said that, in this setting, ours was clearly "the children's table." An amusing remark, but since I should rather dine among artists than among all but a very small number of politicians—most of them, now that I think about it, dead—I continue not to find anything of the put-down in our seating arrangements that night.

Many a put-down is engendered in a sticky fluid of ambiguity. An example of what I have in mind is the remark of the man or woman who said that "Wagner's music is better than it sounds." Or Peter Ustinov's comment on the embarrassing candor of Laurence Olivier's memoirs: "I wish he'd put on a false nose and be himself again." Henry James's conversation had something of this quality; it was stippled, as Edith Wharton noted, with "merry malice." Weldon Kees reported that Marianne Moore was capable of a similar merry maliciousness, and often used the words *generous* and *courageous* to mean the reverse of what they are supposed to mean.

Here the put-down slides into that marshier terrain known as the put-on. If the put-down is an imaginative insult, the put-on tends to be an ambiguous one—so much so that the insulted party often isn't even aware that he is being insulted. The word *put-on* derives from the notion of putting something over *on* somebody. "To put someone on is, almost by definition, to rob him of his cool," writes Jacob Brackman in *The Put-On*, a slender volume that carries the splendidly put-on-ish dedication, "To my mother and father, right?" The put-on has an air of tongue-in-cheek about it; it attempts, in E. E. Cummings's phrase, to "pull the wool over your toes."

I am myself made edgy in the company of a put-on artist. Cutting through the clouds of ambiguity, the mists of irony, the vapors of conversational strategy leaves me a bit weary. I prefer to retain what little cool remains to me. Before a talk I gave some while ago in Denver, though, I nearly lost it when, over drinks, I was introduced to a rather open-faced man with a rather commonplace name like Dick Hansen or Henry Johnson, who, with a friendly smile, said, "It's been a long time since high school." Oh, God, I thought, why can't I remember this guy? I strained to do so; then, certain he would think me a great snob and a creep into the bargain, I caved in and apologetically admitted that I wasn't sure I remembered him from high school. He allowed as how this was understandable, since we had never gone to high school together, adding that what he had just done to me he had done to scores of other strangers roughly his own age upon first being introduced to them. I chuckled insincerely, regretting one more time that I was not 6′ 7″.

No question about it, folks do tend to get a bit touchy about being put on. My dear friend, the audacious and resourceful Roberto Ginsburg, once demonstrated for me just how touchy they can get. He had visited me at my office at a large corporation for which I then worked. At the close of his visit, I walked him to the elevators, where I introduced him to a youngish vice president, who happened also to be awaiting an elevator, and they both went down in the elevator together. The next day the vice president greeted me by saying that he had had no idea that I was a professional bowler. I knew immediately what had happened. In his twenty-five-second or so ride in the elevator, my friend Roberto had filled this fellow with a mine of misinformation about me. I now had to explain this to the astonished man standing before me, who was in a state of considerable consternation. "You must understand," I said, "the joke here is really on me. I now have to go through this elaborate explanation, telling you how I intensely dislike bowling, that my father does not weigh more



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than three hundred pounds [another piece of false information Roberto had filled him in on], and God knows what else. You were the foil, yet I am the butt of this put-on." All he could say in return was, "Boy, is that guy sick!" And for roughly two weeks afterward, whenever I would run into him, he would say, "You know, that friend of yours is really sick."

The young vice president failed to understand the methods of a true artist such as Roberto: his readiness to seize an opportunity, his not needing to be on the premises when his art achieves its effects, his fine and evenhanded disinterest. What I suspect really puzzled him was the absence of obvious motive in all this. But for Roberto, it was motive enough that his old friend be caught in his cunningly set trap, which I was. I could of course have neglected to tell him that his trap had sprung, catching my nose firmly within; yet artists working in such minor genres as the put-on need all the appreciation they can get, so I did indeed tell him, cur that he is, that his ploy had worked exquisitely.

The famous one-upmanship, devised by Stephen Potter and promulgated in such of his books as *One-upmanship*, *Gamesmanship*, and *Lifemanship*, usually has a clearer motive and, when working well, combines the qualities of the put-on and the put-down. Potter's idea was to formulate those ploys and gambits that, in everyday life, will provoke, put off, and generally get the other fellow down. The classic illustration, the paradigmatic (an O.K. word I suspect Potter would greatly approve) case, is that of the one-upman who, upon hearing someone tell a joke about a man with a wooden leg, does not laugh but instead walks stiffly away with an emphatic limp. Potter felt that there were certain situations in life that were essentially unfair—one's relation to one's physician, for example—and he set out to redress the balance. (His plan for combating "the natural one-downedness of the unclothed" in a physician's office involves having oneself telephoned in the midst of an examination by a woman with an aristocratic, confident, and obviously sexy voice, and not only taking the call but engaging the woman in a lengthy, uproarious conversation.) Through his comic methods, Potter sought to create a creeping sense of "dis-ease" in the hearts of the natural intellectual bullies, social frauds, and general hustlers one encounters in the traffic of everyday life. Quoting what he falsely claimed to be one of the unpublished notebooks of Rilke (very much an O.K. name), Potter affirmed: " '. . . if you're not one up (*Blitzleisch*) you're . . . one down (*Rotzleisch*).' "

Laudable though Potter's ends were, and wonderfully perverse his means, I fear that his banner has been captured by his true enemies, so that today one-upmanship is rampant in such intellectual black holes as university faculty lounges and lecture halls. There it tends to be used less to redress life's natural injustice, less to come to the aid of those born un-beautiful and un-lucky, than to reinforce snobbery and to puff up petty vanity. Academic put-downs do not usually excite much interest, for the reason that they tend to be rather too specialized, with the exception of those in philosophy. Among the many stories told of Morris Cohen, the philosophy teacher at CCNY, one of my favorites takes the form of a put-down. A student, in a state of considerable agitation, asks Cohen, "How can you prove to me that I exist?" In his Yiddish-accented English, Cohen shot back, "Who's esking?" The so-called ordinary-language philosopher J. L. Austin once gave a lecture in New York at which he pronounced that while in most languages two negatives in a sentence were equivalent to a positive, in no language did two positives equal a negative, whereupon a voice thick with sarcasm from the audience called out, "Yeah, yeah!"

Writers, though, remain the supreme champions of the put-down, and women writers may be best of all. I have always prized a gem of the genre provided by the novelist Josephine Herbst, who, after telling the critic Leslie Fiedler that he looked not at all as she had imagined, was supposedly asked by Fiedler what in fact he did look like. "Well, if you must know," said Miss Herbst, "you look like one of those soft people in Turgenev," which of course Fiedler precisely does. Dorothy Parker seemed to speak in put-downs almost exclusively, including, a specialty with her, self-put-downs. Coming up pregnant as a result of an affair with a man who deserted her, she is said to have remarked, "That's what I get for putting all my eggs into one bastard." And of course there was the famous incident in which Clare Boothe Luce held open a door for Dorothy Parker, announcing,



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"Age before beauty," to which Dorothy Parker, blithely walking through, rejoined, "Pearls before swine."

The best example of Dorothy Parker's put-down power I know, however, I recently read in Dorothy Herrmann's biography of S. J. Perelman, who was Dorothy Parker's friend and neighbor in Bucks County, Pennsylvania. As Miss Herrmann tells the story, one day Perelman, invited to dinner at Dorothy Parker's, arrived at her home shocked to find that she and her husband had cut down three magnificent Norway maples that stood in front of their house. Perelman, a lover of nature, said sarcastically, "You must have needed the wood awful bad." The remark offended Dorothy Parker so much that she and Perelman did not speak for years. Trying to make it up, Perelman invited Dorothy Parker and her husband to dinner, including among his guests a man who greatly admired her writing. After the dinner, Perelman asked her what she thought of the man. According to Perelman, she said: "You must have needed the wood awful bad." This strikes me as the most brilliant, delayed, wow, hot damn, oh-vengeance-is-mine-saith-the-Lord put-down I have ever heard.

If one's personal style is ironic, if one uses irony to puncture what one takes to be deceit, hypocrisy, and illusion, then it is likely to be received as having an air of put-down to it, and one is oneself likely to make everyone (or, at any rate, many a one) a bit uneasy. I believe that I have a minor but probably just reputation as a put-down artist, chiefly based on some literary and political criticisms I have written. I shouldn't like to be thought principally a put-down artist, though, and I hope that such put-downs as I have executed, in person and in print, have not been gratuitous but reasonably well deserved. I do not think of myself as someone who gets excited at the prospect of committing a resounding put-down. Frankly, I'd rather sit on the couch, my cat on my lap, and listen to Mozart. Yet why can't I drive from my mind this picture of myself walking into the restaurant at the Watergate, proceeding back into the kitchen, where I drop a twenty-five-pound bag of salt at the feet of the chef, and cry out, "Jean-Louis, baby, what's shakin'?"



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# The Idea of Tradition in American Art Criticism

HILTON KRAMER

OF THE MANY CHANGES which have overtaken the life of art in our time, none perhaps is more striking to an observer of my generation than the way in which the concept of tradition has in recent years all but ceased to be a vital critical issue. In the vast quantity of writing which is nowadays devoted to art, especially new or recent art, the concept of tradition is either entirely absent as an aesthetic desideratum, or, if reference is made to it at all, it is invoked merely to indicate some plausible connection between what is happening now and what happened last week or last year—or, for those with slightly longer memories, ten or fifteen years ago. It has become a tag, in other words, to indicate the shortest distance between two points on the contemporary art scene. The concept of tradition has thus ceased to be an imperative factor in the discussion of art. The position it long enjoyed in critical discourse as an aesthetic consideration has been vacated, and what has taken its place is not so much an alternative concept as an attempt to bypass the very questions which the concept of tradition once encompassed.

This represents a considerable change in the way we think about art and in the way criticism addresses itself to art. We seem already to be well advanced into a period in which the very idea of tradition is becoming obsolete—except, perhaps, in what we might call a strictly Ralph Lauren context. It may therefore be worth casting a backward glance at this idea to examine the ways it has been used, and indeed abused, before we bid it farewell forever and face the consequences of its demise.

I shall be discussing, for the most part, two twentieth-century American art critics in whose work, it seems to me, the concept of tradition is especially illuminating. The first is Royal Cortissoz, who, as the art critic for the *New York Herald Tribune* (and other publications) in

HILTON KRAMER is the author of, among other books, *The Age of the Avant-Garde* and *The Revenge of the Philistines*. The above essay is adapted from a lecture Mr. Kramer gave in January 1987 at the 92nd Street Y in New York under the auspices of the *New Criterion* magazine of which he is the editor.



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the years before and after the First World War, came to symbolize everything that was most reactionary in the public opposition to the modern movement in this country. The second is Clement Greenberg, who, beginning with his contributions to *Partisan Review* and the *Nation* in 1939, emerged as the most important critical champion of the modern movement in the history of American art criticism. Royal Cortissoz and Clement Greenberg: obviously they are very different figures who have written from very different perspectives—Cortissoz, the very archetype of the patrician who speaks for established institutions and the cultural status quo; Greenberg, an ex-Marxist of the Trotskyist persuasion who becomes an ardent spokesman for abstract art and for what has come to be characterized as the "formalist" position in art criticism. They would appear to agree on almost nothing having to do with the art of the modern age—or indeed, with art generally. Yet each brings to bear a certain concept of tradition in his writings on art—in Cortissoz's case, what might be called the traditionalist view of tradition; and in Greenberg's, what has to be called the modernist view of tradition.

Royal Cortissoz, though a considerable eminence in his day (he died in 1948 at age seventy-nine), is now—except among a few scholars—an all but forgotten figure. If he is remembered by anyone else today, it is mainly because Arthur Dove, one of the early American modernist painters whose work Cortissoz failed to appreciate, made a collage in 1925 which is a caricature of Cortissoz. (It now reposes in the permanent collection of the Whitney Museum in New York.) Called *The Critic,* the work shows us a faceless figure who wears a top hat on his head, roller skates on his feet, and a monocle dangling from a black cord around his neck. In his left hand, this comical apparition wields not a pen but a vacuum cleaner. His body, however, is made of nothing more substantial than bits of newsprint, which are drawn (one supposes) from Cortissoz's articles in the *Herald Tribune* and which constitute a sly reference to the kind of Cubist *papier collé* Cortissoz had no eye for. *The Critic* is an amusing piece of work and accurately represents a judgment that was fairly widespread in the "advanced" art world of the twenties. That Arthur Dove selected Cortissoz as his target is itself a testimony, of course, to the critic's pre-eminent position at the time, and it is as the leading representative of critical reaction in his day that Cortissoz has passed into the folklore of American art history.

It must be said that his position in this regard was not unearned. Cortissoz's reputation as a philistine has not been exaggerated. He was the real thing. Writing in 1913, for example, about the Armory Show—the mammoth exhibition of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century European and American art which gave the New York public its first



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comprehensive look at the modern movement—Cortissoz gave us the essentials of what the traditionalist, or philistine, view of tradition then was. The Armory Show was, of course, the great test for critics of Cortissoz's generation, and it was a test that he, at any rate, conspicuously failed to meet. Tradition, for Cortissoz, was found on this occasion to have terminated in the Impressionism of Claude Monet. What followed Monet in the work of the Postimpressionists, in Cézanne, van Gogh, and Gauguin, and even more so in the Fauvism of Matisse, the Cubism of Picasso, and the abstract painting of Kandinsky, was looked upon as little more—and sometimes a lot less—than an aberration and an indulgence.

The standards Cortissoz applied in these matters were fairly simple ones. (The book of essays in which Cortissoz's commentary on the Armory Show was published is called *Art and Common Sense.*) There were, in fact, only two such standards. Fidelity to what Cortissoz called "the truths of nature" was one of them, and a certain idea of technical accomplishment (mainly academic drawing) was the other. In respect to both, the artists we regard as modern masters were said to have failed. About Cézanne, Cortissoz wrote that "he simply did not know his trade," and further, that "he was merely a second-rate Impressionist who had now and then fair luck in painting a moderately good picture." To this judgment Cortissoz added a note which has been sounded many times since in the writings of critics who, disapproving of new artistic developments, seek reasons other than aesthetic ones for explaining the success of what they most dislike. Cézanne, Cortissoz wrote, "would never have come into fame at all if the dealers had not taken him up and there had not been the usual band of scribes ready to applaud something new." This, by the way, is not exactly untrue. Dealers and critics do play a crucial role in promoting the work of artists whose qualities are unfamiliar and even distasteful to us, especially on first acquaintance, and it would be foolish to deny it—especially since, in many cases, it is a perfectly honorable thing for dealers and critics to do. In any case, Cortissoz wrote similar things about van Gogh and Gauguin, as well as Matisse. Matisse was said to "have relinquished all respect for technique," and his pictures were judged to be "false to nature"; so he, too, failed to meet the two standards which Cortissoz held to be central. Picasso and Kandinsky fared a good deal worse in Cortissoz's judgment. All were artists who could not be fitted into the critic's concept of tradition, and, outside the boundaries of that tradition, there was no way they could be taken seriously.

Ten years later, in a volume of essays entitled *American Artists*, published in 1923, Cortissoz restated his position in the same unequivocal terms. "I believe in the art that is faithful to . . . a sane vision of



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nature and an honest craftsmanship. . . . I disbelieve in modernism because it seems to me to flout fundamental laws and to repudiate what I take to be the function of art, the creation of beauty."

Creating "beauty," however, did not turn out to be a purely aesthetic matter. It rarely is, by the way. Other, less benign issues were also involved. In this same volume, Cortissoz gave his readers a glimpse of what they were. In a short essay called "Ellis Island Art," he once again denounced the spread of modernism, but now added a new note of alarm. "There is something in this art situation analogous to what has been so long going on in our racial melting-pot. . . . The United States is invaded by aliens, thousands of whom constitute so many perils to the health of the body politic. Modernism is of precisely the same heterogeneous alien origin and is imperilling the republic of art in the same way." Again citing the consequences of Postimpressionism, Cubism, and other modernist movements, Cortissoz wrote: "These movements have been promoted by types not yet fitted for their first papers in aesthetic naturalization—the makers of true Ellis Island art."

Until we encounter this chilling note of xenophobia in his writing, Royal Cortissoz may strike us as, if not exactly an innocent, then as some sort of benighted but essentially harmless gentleman amateur—a last gasp, perhaps, of the genteel tradition that dominated our culture before modernism arrived to cut off its supply of oxygen. And it is certainly true that Cortissoz's notion of tradition was one that very much conformed to the tenets of the genteel tradition, with its yearning for a world free of the kind of unruly emotions, exacerbated social conflicts, disruptive artistic innovations, and alien influences that we associate with the modern age. Faced with an essay like "Ellis Island Art," with its clearly articulated social doctrine, we are obliged, I think, to see Cortissoz as something more than a patrician dodo harboring illusions about a moribund cultural ideal.

For as it happened, the social doctrine articulated in "Ellis Island Art," with its unlovely mixture of nativist ideology, anti-modernist sentiment, political isolationism, and frankly stated racialism, has proved in most of its fundamental components to be a persistent theme in American criticism from Cortissoz's day to our own. It was given a particularly robust expression in the thirties in the populist criticism of another writer now forgotten, Thomas Craven—the most popular writer on art in his day—who, in championing the regionalist painters of the American Scene school, mounted a similar attack on modernism as an essentially alien (that is, un-American) form of art. And in our own day, this reading of modernism as posing some sort of threat to a nativist American tradition has been revived yet again by another popular writer on art (alas, not yet forgotten), namely Tom Wolfe, in whose book, *From*



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*Bauhaus to Our House*, the whole development of modernist architecture is denounced as an essentially un-American activity.

This is not the place, I think, to argue with these theories. But it is worth noting that in the case of Thomas Craven's defense of a regionalist painter like Thomas Hart Benton, an art derived from the style of El Greco, a Greek who worked in Spain, turns out to be somehow more "American" than the art derived from Cézanne; and that in the case of Tom Wolfe, architectural styles derived from the Beaux-Arts in Paris or from sundry amalgams of the Gothic and the Romanesque are likewise held to be somehow more "American" than anything derived from Le Corbusier and Mies van der Rohe. What is finally imperative to note about this entire farrago of socio-aesthetic theories is that the notion of tradition which is upheld in them is in the end a bogus one. For the traditionalist, or philistine, concept of tradition is not really a viable concept of tradition at all, but an attempt to arrest or repeal the life of culture itself and "restore" us, if that is the word, to some never-never land where time stands still and the dynamism of life as we know it in the modern world will remain permanently screened from our consciousness. It also serves to remind us that the concept of tradition is meaningless if the tradition in question is incapable of accommodating and indeed giving meaning to new artistic developments.

When we turn to the art criticism of Clement Greenberg, we are a long way from the patrician dream world of Royal Cortissoz. We look out on a world in which everything Cortissoz took for granted has collapsed. There is no question of any attempt to repeal the modern world or to substitute the myths of the genteel tradition for the very real problems which that world confronts us with. On the contrary, we are smack up against the most recalcitrant pressures of modern life, and there is no escaping them. And the most compelling issue before us is precisely the question of new creative developments.

The climate of Greenberg's criticism is a harsh one. In it the tasks of art are understood to be arduous and always in danger of being compromised and corrupted. Indeed, the very existence of art as a significant human enterprise is radically endangered. The past does not offer us a refuge from the present, but only a guide to what has been done and cannot be done again in the future. Tradition, in this conception of it, is definitely not the cultural retirement plan envisioned by Royal Cortissoz. Art, in Greenberg's critical universe, is severely constricted in its aesthetic options, and the only options that count are the purely aesthetic ones. We are, in other words, totally enclosed in the tradition of modernism, and from this tradition there is no exit—except, of course, the kind that leads straight to the dreaded realm of academicism, commercialism, and kitsch.



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Greenberg has been writing art criticism for nearly fifty years now, and as befits a career that has achieved immense influence as well as such an impressive longevity, he has become something of an institution in our cultural life. Having become an institution, he has, like Royal Cortissoz before him, inevitably been made the subject of a hostile caricature—in his case, a drawing by David Levine in the *New York Review of Books* depicting him as a papal eminence, a not-so-sly reference to the infallibility that some of Greenberg's more devoted followers have allegedly attributed to him. More seriously, his institutional status has now been marked by the multi-volume publication of his *Collected Essays and Reviews* by the University of Chicago Press. (Two volumes have just been published, and two more are to come.) To achieve the status of an institution in our culture is, inevitably, to become an object of criticism and controversy, and this, too, Greenberg has certainly achieved. Just as his ideas have won him significant acolytes, they have also brought him some fierce opposition, and it is my impression that this is just as true today as it was in the forties and fifties when his articles and reviews were appearing with far greater frequency than is nowadays the case. And this I take to mean that, by friends and foes alike, Greenberg's ideas and judgments are thought to deal with issues which really matter.

If we inquire into the nature of these issues, we find that they all, in one degree or another, owe their importance to the place they occupy in Greenberg's account of the tradition of modernism. For Greenberg, modernism is not primarily or exclusively an aesthetic idea, and still less is it a style of art. It is an overarching historical phenomenon which, whether we like it or not, is seen to have shaped our understanding of what it is possible for art to be—and not be—in the post-Enlightenment civilization of the West during the last two centuries. In this view, modernism is not an option for art in our time, but an ineluctable imperative if there is to be any art worthy of the name. And it is, of course, the ineluctable nature of this imperative which has made Greenberg's view of modernism so distasteful to his many adversaries—that, and also the fact that so much has had to be left out of the art which meets his standards for what a truly modernist art—which is to say, a truly vital art—is.

There are several key pieces in which Greenberg has developed this philosophy of modernism, the most notable being "Avant-Garde and Kitsch" (1939), "Towards a Newer Laocoon" (1940), and the essay "Modernist Painting," published in the late fifties. As the latter is in certain respects a refinement of some of the principal ideas to be found in the earlier essays—and also has the virtue of being shorn of the kind of Marxist phraseology which sometimes disfigured these earlier es-



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says—it is to the essay "Modernist Painting" that we must turn for the clearest account of the historical phenomenon which Greenberg believes to be central to the life of art in our time.

He begins this essay by asserting that "modernism includes more than just art and literature."

> By now it includes almost the whole of what is truly alive in our culture. It happens, also, to be very much of a historical novelty. Western civilization is not the first to turn around and question its own foundations, but it is the civilization that has gone furthest in doing so. I identify Modernism with the intensification, almost the exacerbation, of this self-critical tendency that began with the philosopher Kant. Because he was the first to criticize the means itself of criticism, I conceive of Kant as the first real Modernist.

For Greenberg, then, "The essence of Modernism lies . . . in the use of the characteristic methods of a discipline to criticize the discipline itself—not in order to subvert it, but to entrench it more firmly in its area of competence." It is in this notion of a discipline (such as painting) entrenching itself ever more firmly in its area of competence—and indeed, confining itself to its area of competence—that Greenberg's most original contribution to the theory of modernism is to be found.

"Each art," he writes, "had to determine, through the operations peculiar to itself, the effects peculiar and exclusive to itself." Greenberg was under no illusions about the costs involved, especially the cost of narrowness. "By doing this," he writes, "each art would, to be sure, narrow its area of competence, but at the same time it would make its possession of this area all the more secure." It is at this point that Greenberg spells out exactly what this concentration on "its area of competence" has meant for modernist painting:

> Realistic, illusionist art had dissembled the medium, using art to conceal art. Modernism used art to call attention to art. The limitations that constitute the medium of painting—the flat surface, the shape of the support, the properties of pigment—were treated by the Old Masters as negative factors that could be acknowledged only implicitly or indirectly. Modernist painting has come to regard these same limitations as positive factors that are to be acknowledged openly.

And of all the limitations that are seen to constitute the medium of painting, it is one in particular—what Greenberg describes as "the ineluctable flatness of the support" (that is, the flatness of the picture surface)—that remained, as he writes, "most fundamental in the processes by which pictorial art criticized and defined itself under Modernism. Flatness alone was unique and exclusive to that art." Flatness would thus offer a key to the future development of modernist painting. Readers of Tom Wolfe's other excursion into art criticism—*The Painted*



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*Word*—will recall that it was precisely this notion of "flatness" in Greenberg's account of modernist painting that he attempted to ridicule and reduce to absurdity, and in general have a great deal of merriment with. But in doing so, Wolfe only revealed that he had never really thought much about the aesthetics of painting, and had not even begun to grasp its rudiments, so that when the laughter of those as ignorant as himself had subsided, the issue as Greenberg defined it remained more or less untouched.

Greenberg is best known to us, of course, as the great champion of abstract art. It should therefore be noted that in this discussion of painting's "area of competence," nothing has thus far been said about the abandonment of representation in modernist painting. Greenberg's discussion of this issue, too, is one that has been much debated.

> It is not in principle that Modernist painting in its latest phase has abandoned the representation of recognizable objects. What it has abandoned in principle is the representation of the kind of space that recognizable, three-dimensional objects can inhabit. . . . Three-dimensionality is the province of sculpture, and for the sake of its own autonomy painting has had above all to divest itself of everything it might share with sculpture. And it is in the course of its effort to do this . . . that painting has made itself abstract.

It is this aspect of Greenberg's argument, by the way, that has lately prompted the painter Frank Stella to take issue with the view that abstract painting is somehow tied to an anti-illusionist conception of pictorial space. Yet Stella's position, recently set forth in his Norton Lectures, called *Working Space,* is severely compromised by the fact that, as an artist, he has been obliged to abandon painting for sculpture in order to effect the kind of space he favors for his art.

Why, it must be asked of this theory of modernism, is it so important, then, that painting confine itself so rigorously to its own area of competence? In Greenberg's view, this is the only way left for painting to survive as a viable art. Which is why the tradition of modernism is the only tradition likely to be a source of support for the continued vitality of art.

> We know [he writes] what has happened to an activity like religion that has not been able to avail itself of "Kantian" immanent criticism in order to justify itself. At first glance the arts might seem to have been in a situation like religion's. Having been denied by the Enlightenment all tasks they could take seriously, [the arts] looked as though they were going to be assimilated to entertainment pure and simple, and entertainment itself looked as though it were going to be assimilated, like religion, to therapy.

"The arts could save themselves from this leveling down," Greenberg continues, "only by demonstrating that the kind of experience they



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provided was valuable in its own right and not to be obtained from any other kind of activity."

It is—I think you will agree—a bleak view of art, and a bleak view of our civilization that Greenberg offers us in this account of modernism, and we naturally recoil from the impoverishments that it sets down not as a cultural option but as an historical fait accompli. We naturally prefer ampler and richer alternatives than those that are given us in the tradition of modernism as Greenberg has defined it in this essay, and in his other writings. But in our search for those alternatives, and in our arguments about them, it behooves us to recall this critic's dour reminder about the danger of the arts being assimilated to entertainment, and of entertainment being assimilated to therapy, for that is, in large part, what has happened to the arts. Looking back on what has happened in the thirty years or so since Greenberg wrote "Modernist Painting"—looking back on the changes that have overtaken our art museums, our theaters, our concert halls and opera houses, and on the way criticism, or so-called criticism, has come to deal with them—can we honestly say that we have escaped the fate that was forecast there? I don't think we can.

About this tradition of modernism—either as Clement Greenberg has defined it or as we may wish to amend it—we may often feel inclined to say, as Marianne Moore famously said of poetry: I, too, dislike it. At the same time, however, we know that we have now witnessed enough of what has come to be called "postmodern" culture to see what the alternative is: precisely that avalanche of academicism, commercialism, and kitsch that is always ready to swamp our culture in the absence of a tradition vigorous enough to resist it. We have seen enough of what postmodernism has to offer us to have learned, perhaps, that it is only upon the foundations of modernism that the idea of tradition itself can now be salvaged, if it can be salvaged at all. Whether we can muster the imagination and the moral energy to revitalize this resistant tradition is, of course, a question that remains to be answered.



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# *The Right Way to Escape from a Sinking Ship*

MICHAEL SPENCE

It may start with a torpedo or missile,
A tracer striking the magazine, making
A deadly gift of light. Between wars,
Your enemies will be reefs, icebergs,
Other ships sunk just below the surface.

So many things can show you how thin
Your hull always was. You won't believe
How fast the water rushes in, trying
To cleanse you for all the time you've ridden
Its back. When your metal world starts

To list, climb the tilting ladder quick:
You must be on deck for the sea's muster
Before it fills the hold—your final cargo.
Remember to flee the lower side: pretend
You are scaling a mountain of steel

That grows steeper every moment. Make sure
No debris, like your shipmates, is floating
Below you. Heed the chaplain: cross yourself.
Cross your arms over your chest; cross
Your ankles to guard your crotch. Then jump

Like a spear—straight, with a small splash.
The ocean rewards the fancy diver
With a blackout or broken limbs. Its surface
May be fire. Flaming oil is good cover
When you're shot at. Swim underwater



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As far as you can. Trick your lungs: pretend
You are breathing by sucking in your stomach.
Paddling your hands back and forth beneath
Your burning ceiling, you can make a hole
For a short gasp. When you rise beyond it,

And you see the ship going down, the time
For flight is gone. Lie on your back: pretend
You are boneless as a jellyfish. Water
Funneling down stacks into the boilers
May blow your ship to shrapnel—turning

Even that refuge into thousands of knives.
Put a hand between your legs or the blast
Will impale you. When the sea at last seems
Calm again, look for boats, survivors: pretend
There are some and they are looking for you.

If you see none, swim for whatever floats—
To survive you must find something to cling to.
And if there is not a single kapok jacket
Or stick of wood, one last thing may save you.
Relax—take a breath, and bow your head

Into the water. Some have lasted for hours, lifting up
Only for air. Stay calm; keep your mind blank.
Let the sea hold you, feel your face: pretend
When it knows you, you can fool it: pretend
You are already dead.

✪ MICHAEL SPENCE's first book of poems, *The Spine*, is forthcoming from Purdue University Press. His work has appeared in *Poetry* and other magazines. "The Right Way to Escape from a Sinking Ship" is the sixth winner of the Mary Elinore Smith Poetry Prize. The $200 prize is given in memory of Miss Smith by her family and friends. Mary Elinore Smith, who died in 1981, was an editor of THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR.



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# *Marcus Aurelius*

JOAN ALESHIRE

The smooth bronze face in our textbooks
floated peaceful and dull: the good emperor
every teacher admired. They loved to quote:
"Contentment with everything that happens—
that is enough," and especially: "Wipe out
imagination: check desire: extinguish
appetite." What I wanted was passion,
not knowing then how Marcus labored,
traveling from post to post in his
crumbling empire, writing to remind
himself: "Whatever anyone says, I must
be good." Outside his drafty tent, dogs
quarreled in the dark; a man laughed
as he reached for another man's wife.
Two drunken soldiers tossed a coin
to see which would stand watch; it shone
in the dusty road like the moon that
lighted it. Shadows of what at first seemed
bushes or boulders began to move, as a tribe
no one had ever heard of before crawled
closer to the wall. Attending only
to the words in your head, seeking no
sympathy, Marcus, remind me when I am
tempted to outrage, how you bent
to your page, building your monument
to duty and reason, each curve and angle
of ink gleaming in the firelight
as if carved from obsidian.

JOAN ALESHIRE teaches at Warren Wilson College and is the author of *Cloud Train*, a book of poems.



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# Deep Red

## The International Debt Crisis and Its Historical Precedents

HAROLD JAMES

THE WORLD IS FULL OF DEBT: private credit has expanded, and so has international lending. When repayments on all this seem doubtful, observers talk about a "debt crisis." Such crises occur from time to time: in fact we might even look to the Bible for an example of how ancient peoples handled these periodic collapses. Ancient Judaic law provided for a "jubile" every forty-nine years (a mystical seven times seven). There was at the jubile, or jubilee, a general remission of debt, and a universal rejoicing.

Such a well-managed and regulated solution to the debt problem avoids all the recriminations that follow the less well prepared crises of confidence with which we are more familiar. There are many people, and many countries, that could well benefit from a modern revival of the jubile. At the moment, the international debt crisis threatens the political stability of debtor countries and helps to poison international relations. In part, this is because of the way we react to borrowing.

Debt often makes everyone involved feel uncomfortable. If I borrow, someone else controls my future. I also feel morally obliged, bound, or in debt: it is striking how words such as *obliged*, which originally had a quite simple contractual meaning ("obliged" to repay) acquired over time a moral sense as well. Very often a moral subservience is implied by what was originally simply a financial dependency.

In the modern world we have become partly acclimatized to the uncomfortable implications of indebtedness. Having good ideas, and employing other people's money to realize them, is essential to modern economic development. Without a belief that financial transactions were relatively secure and could be managed reasonably honestly, the growth of long-distance trade, the construction of large factories, and big

HAROLD JAMES, assistant professor of history at Princeton University, is the author of *The German Slump: Politics and Economics, 1924–1936.*



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investments in technical research would all have been impossible.

In fact, the industry that has grown most impressively and most consistently over the last two centuries has been what economists inelegantly term "financial intermediation." Financial services are primarily involved in trading debts of one kind or another—loans at fixed or variable interest and bearing differing degrees of risk—and continually reassessing their values relative to each other, and relative to holdings of equity. We pay people very highly to trade in financial securities—on the whole, much more highly than to manage industries or to make goods. Professional academic economists, almost always of course less well paid than the traders in debt, often deplore this as a misallocation of resources. Bankers and stockbrokers, they say, do not make anything useful or valuable. The fact that they are paid so much only lures ambitious and talented young people away from more rewarding and life-enhancing experiences.

People who trade in debt get paid so much partly because their work demands high levels of skill, alertness, and endurance, all of which are rewarded. But there are other occupations that have similar requirements and that are not so well rewarded. The fundamental cause of the expansion of the financial sector and its continuing demand for more manpower is simply that more people want to take advantage of the services it is offering. The world is getting more and more indebted, and more and more happy to be indebted.

The old-fashioned morality that warns against the evil consequences of debt and the clerical morality that condemned usury have been put aside. Such revolt against the condemnation of debt and usury is not new. Shakespeare depicts Polonius, who originally gave the advice, "Neither a borrower nor a lender be," as a tiresome and foolish old man. He should not have been so fond of moralizing and of prying into other people's affairs—and in fact these traits eventually ended his life.

The expansion of debt has been a feature of both private and of international life. Young American culture revolves around high debts (credit cards, mortgages, overdrafts) and low savings. The rapid development in the 1970s of international lending appeared to reflect the same happiness with larger and larger volumes of debt.

A number of causes contributed to the mushrooming of international credit. The dramatically increased revenues of oil-exporting countries were being put on the money market. Within the United States, corporate borrowers increasingly issued their own securities and needed to borrow less from the banks. In consequence, a borrowers' market developed, and banks felt under pressure to turn to a newly glamorous international debt market.

There also developed a belief that these loans were highly secure.



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Bankers explained why interest rates for loans to developing countries were so low by saying that these were sovereign borrowers. States could not afford the risk of reneging on their debt since they would always want to borrow in the future.

The argument about the special status of sovereign borrowers looks flawed from the perspective of the 1980s. In part it was a self-sustaining illusion: sovereign borrowers simply took up more loans to service old ones. As long as this continued, and as long as people thought that it would continue, the loans looked secure. When, as in 1982, the supply of new money dried up, it became almost impossible to maintain service payments. Now the development of sovereign borrowing on the basis of recycled offshore funds in the 1970s looks like a classic example of a chain-letter operation, in which everyone makes money as long as the scheme expands, but which the better-advised participants realize cannot continue forever.

There is a point at which the benefits of not servicing outstanding debt outweigh the costs of not being able to borrow more for some time in the future. By 1987, a number of significant borrowers—Peru, and most damagingly in the light of its huge ($108 billion) outstanding debt, Brazil—have reached this position.

But here we come across one of the most curious points about the psychology of debt. If we are faced with something disagreeable or unpleasant that is the product of our own actions and that we cannot escape from, we find ways of demonstrating that it is either inevitable and desirable, or that it is all someone else's fault. In any process that involves several actors, everything can be labeled as someone else's doing. So each actor believes that it is not necessary to undertake corrective measures and that the burdens of adjusting to the unpleasant reality can and should be undertaken by the other actors.

The expansion of debt—both domestically and internationally—is a fine example of the operation of this psychological mechanism. We are familiar with those individuals who blame credit-card companies for their extravagant and ill-ordered lives—credit-card companies who can see nothing wrong with offering facilities to large numbers of unsuitable people. The same kinds of arguments are made on an international level.

When Mexico announced in August 1982 that it could not continue its debt servicing, the world financial system was badly shaken. The major U.S. banks had Latin American, East European (particularly Polish), and developing country debt exposure that far exceeded their capital. Some observers predicted immediate catastrophe, while others thought that, given time, the problem might go away. In the five years since the debt crisis (and isn't five years rather a long period to speak of a "crisis"? are we now in a crisis as a normal state?), waves of optimism about a solution



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to the world crisis were followed by relapses into pessimism.

Certain rules of the game were established: the creditor banks, worried about the consequences of being forced to write off their sovereign loans, negotiated with the debtor states, renewed short-term credits (known as "rolling over"), and even lent more in the hope that one day there would be repayments as developing countries developed successfully—or perhaps in the slightly more realistic hope that if the whole process went on for long enough, other more crucial international issues would overshadow the debt question.

In the wake of the 1982 warning sign, developing country debt still continued to grow, though at a slower rate than in the 1970s. At the same time, the rules of this rescheduling game were continually modified, bent, and circumvented. In 1986, Peru unilaterally reduced debt servicing to a proportion of its receipts from exports; and Brazil, once its abortive monetary and fiscal stabilization plan (the "cruzado") collapsed, followed this lead in February 1987 in the hope of bullying the bankers into agreeing to a better package.

Should we be surprised that the world debt crisis is not more dramatic and that it has not produced a sudden explosion? Here the lessons of history are revealing: there have been many debt crises in the past involving sovereign borrowers, and they went on and on for a very long time indeed.

The general pattern—reduced to its crudest and simplest level—goes as follows. Country A appears to be successful—militarily, politically, or economically. Bankers B are attracted by the success—how could they miss out on such a lucrative opportunity? So they lend to A and allow A to continue to be successful. A is so convinced that it deserves its prosperous future that it ignores criticism that the real foundations of its strength are gradually disappearing. It believes that it will be able—thanks to its colossal reputation (this appears in the 1970s as the "sovereign debt illusion")—to maintain its pre-eminent position.

No serious steps are taken in the direction of carrying out any basic reform. Indeed, the chief advantage to the borrower of borrowing is that it *removes* the need for reforms or for attempts to provide a more stable sort of economic growth. B goes on lending to allow A to carry on servicing the debt until B's resources are exhausted. At this point, A stops being able to pay and blames B for its misfortune. While B loses out, A often takes up aggressive and nationalistic slogans to convince itself of its own rectitude.

Spain in the sixteenth century is a good example of this process. Its king had a gigantic overseas empire that sporadically supplied him with cash (shipments of silver bullion), which was used to maintain a slightly less gigantic empire in Europe. Fighting in Italy, France, and the



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Netherlands regularly cost more than the sums provided by the bullion shipments from the New World. This is scarcely surprising: who, faced by what he defines as an emergency, would dream of spending less than he possibly could?

It was lending by the banking houses of Genoa and southern Germany that allowed the Hapsburg monarchs to continue to live in this way. Periodically (1557, 1575, 1596, 1607, 1627, 1647) their loans were subject to an involuntary conversion: short-term loans at high interest rates were transformed into loans so long that no repayment was provided for at all (thus creating perpetual bonds or "juros") and with much lower rates of interest. Yet the fortunes of the bankers were completely tied to the future of the Hapsburg Empire, and they continued to lend.

In 1576, during the sack of Antwerp that followed the bankruptcy of the previous years, Spanish troops forced the agent of the Augsburg house of Fugger to give more money; and fifty years later, in 1626, the Spanish crown imposed a heavy tax on the Fuggers. Eventually, the cost was very high indeed: the Fuggers alone lost eight million Rhenish gulden through dealing with the Hapsburgs. By 1630, observers noted that the Fuggers' legendary wealth was now purely imaginary—it existed only on paper. But this was over a century after the loans had begun. The sixteenth century debt crisis was a hundred-year-long affair.

At the same time, the arrogance of the imperial dynasty increased. Being indebted does not appear to have been a major source of political concern. Spain had a mission—the preservation of the true Catholic faith—that meant much more than mere money. It was, the Hapsburgs believed, anti-religious as well as mean-minded to stand in their way; and Spain became intolerant, obsessed with blood, race, and religion. At the end of Philip II's reign (he died in 1598), it was the king's confessors who were responsible for dealing with the debt, at least partly because clerics could give the best—that is, the most theologically convincing—reasons for defaults.

France in the eighteenth century—another declining power whose ambitions and demands increased as the financial base of its power crumbled—behaved in a similar way. The repeated and costly wars against England were fought on the strength of money raised abroad—largely from Calvinist bankers in Switzerland and the Netherlands. Again, there were frequent conversions and partial defaults, and, again, the French government and the French aristocrats launched a scathing social criticism of the bourgeois (a term of terrible contempt in their mouths) and commercially spirited lenders on whom they looked down with a giddy hauteur. By the 1780s, the limits of the Dutch market were reached, the bankers could not lend more, and in a few years the French



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monarchy, still protesting its social and moral superiority, collapsed as well. This crisis—like the Spanish one—was long drawn out. It was over a century from the time that the French monarch became dependent on the foreign bankers to the Revolution.

The great volume of American overseas lending in the 1920s looks like a more immediately recognizable parallel to the rapid growth of lending that took place in the 1970s. A combination of relatively low interest rates at home and a more speculative spirit regarding investment (the two often go together) meant that American investors were attracted by high-yielding foreign investments whose high degree of risk they did not always appreciate. Investment bankers toured Latin America and the new states in Central Europe created by the Paris Peace Conference, as well as Germany, persuading companies, and especially governments, to issue bonds to be floated on the American market. There was something of the modern "sovereign debtor" illusion here as well.

Often the borrowed money was used simply in order to finance government budget deficits, as states spent more in an effort to keep up living standards. Some of the loans went into capital projects as well—but even in these cases it was often difficult to maintain service payments or to repay short-term loans. The interwar debt crisis began with a default in January 1931 in Bolivia; but it was in Central Europe that the biggest, and politically most destructive, collapses occurred. In 1931 there were banking runs and exchange crises in Hungary, Austria, and Germany. Of these, the German run was—because of the size of the German debt—the most damaging in its repercussion on the international credit system.

Debt crises made the major international depression—the world slump of 1929–32—much more severe and damaged the international political order. The German collapse is a terrifying demonstration of the long-run political as well as economic effects of debt crises. The German central state and the municipalities had borrowed so much that already in 1929 the most conservative and respectable American bankers had become skeptical about German conditions. "The Germans," J. P. Morgan, Jr., concluded pithily, were fundamentally "second-rate people," and he stopped his house from lending. But other smaller and weaker American banks were still willing to lend, and American money was locked into Germany by a fear that a general run would only produce the loss of all the short-term deposits. In the summer of 1931, a crisis erupted—caused by massive German capital flight and by German fears of political instability (in the parliamentary elections of September 1930, both the Nazis and the Communists had performed unexpectedly well). But the British and American banks still believed that something could be saved, and in consequence they now found that their loans were



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frozen by a complex system of currency and exchange controls.

Despite their restraint in the crisis, the foreign banks were blamed for the collapses (a characteristic illustration of the first principle of debt crises: someone else is responsible for them). In 1932 and 1933, it was one of the most appealing parts of the Nazi party's propaganda campaigns that Germany's misfortune was the result of a conspiracy of international and Jewish financiers. And after the Nazi seizure of power, the high volume of foreign debt tied into Germany was even used as a weapon of diplomacy. Preferential concessions to creditors, country by country, were used as a way of winning over some states (Switzerland and Britain) to a less hostile policy and of blocking attempts to construct a Western bloc in the face of Germany's aggressively expansionist foreign policy.

The German case illustrates a second principle of debt crises as well: frozen debt can be used to devastating effect in a sort of blackmail attempt. The more highly indebted a country—and the more hopeless its situation when it comes to repaying debt—the more likely it is to adopt an aggressively nationalist stance, and the more likely it is to believe that the fault lies with the creditors, not the debtors: the creditors should be made to pay for their past immorality. The way in which Brazil's President Sarney links an announcement of the suspension of debt service to a call for "responsible patriotism" is in this way entirely true to the form of the past.

How can we defuse such potentially dangerous political situations? Here again there is a striking lesson from the past. In a hopeless situation, everyone is likely to blame someone else and to look for miracle cures, usually both at the same time. In the interwar years, many people were convinced that there was a short and painless way to bring the world to its senses.

Here, in the 1920s, the whole thorny complex of war reparations and inter-Allied debt was of tremendous importance, not so much because of its real economic effect (which was relatively small), but precisely because it looked to so many people like the major obstacle to recovery, and to a solution of the debt problem. If only, the Germans said—and the British agreed with them—reparations could be canceled and forgotten. If only, the French (the chief beneficiaries of reparations) believed, the Germans could be obliged to make a serious attempt to pay.

But there were other patent solutions that would solve the world's problems at a stroke. If only someone could set up financially strong institutions to guarantee a supply of credit to the debtor countries. There were ideas of setting up a government-sponsored international bank to bail out troubled debtors. Or again, if only the nations of the world could meet and agree to reduce tariff barriers and stabilize exchange rates. The



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list of "if onlys" went on, in a way that is completely familiar to the observer from the 1980s. A consequence of the tendency to look for mono-causal explanations of the crisis was that any attempt at international cooperation to deal with economic difficulties, and all international institutions, suffered from the start because they were overburdened by excessively high expectations.

There were frequent international summits and conferences to treat the world's problems. Statesmen came to a London conference on the German debt issue in 1931, a reparations conference in Lausanne in 1932, and a World Economic Conference again in London in 1933, with high hopes. They believed that a single issue—though they could not agree what that issue was—had caused the world depression. If all the problems were really only caused by reparations, or by a wrong gold policy of the Federal Reserve system, then they might easily be solved. This meant in turn that the much more tricky and politically unpleasant task of domestic adjustments (such as reducing budget deficits or cutting wages) might be avoided.

The Lausanne conference of 1932, in fact, ended reparations, but the world economy did not respond quickly. The depression stayed, and recovery seemed as far away as ever. The political situation even worsened as the Western powers engaged in a furious debate about how the cost of war debts should be apportioned now that they were no longer receiving reparations from the Germans. Debt relief was even more contentious after the first step toward a writing down of debts (namely the ending of the German payments) had been undertaken.

The combination of American intransigence over war debts and high protective tariffs (particularly the Smoot-Hawley Tariff Act of 1930) was now believed in Europe to be *the* cause of the world crisis. At the London conference of 1933, no one was able to work out how to tackle currency reform proposals because they were all agreed that the tariff issue should be settled first. Seen in this way, President Roosevelt's so-called sabotage of the World Economic Conference by his bombshell message that the United States was not prepared to contemplate a dollar stabilization, which effectively killed the conference, was probably the kindest thing he could have done to it.

This is why we should not be too distressed by the failure in the 1980s of grand plans—Felix Rohatyn's for discounting and (government) guaranteeing old debt, or Harold Lever's for a guaranteeing of new capital flows, or even the Baker Plan. Incidentally the first two plans, which were widely canvassed, bear an uncanny resemblance to some widely circulated schemes of the early 1930s—those of Crena de Jongh and of J. W. Beyen (as well as, to a lesser extent, the "Norman Plan," prepared in 1931 at the instigation of the Governor of the Bank of



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England)—schemes that have now sunk into complete and probably deserved oblivion and are even neglected by the history books.

The more a plan resembles a general and overall scheme and the more intellectually compelling it appears to be, the more it is likely to excite opposition from those who can see that they will be negatively affected—the bankers who are supposed to take losses, or the borrowing countries who are supposed to take economy measures. At the same time, the more convincing the grand plan is, the more actors are likely to be tempted to scrap short-term and relatively minor adjustment procedures while they wait for the big success. So the mentality that produces large schemes may easily result in a blocking of action and in a general paralysis.

Of all the modern plans, the Baker scheme (September 1985) is by far the most limited and pragmatic. It aims at a trilateral imposition of the burden of adjustment—the debtor states, the creditor banks, and international institutions would each play a part. Initially, the plan was greeted with considerable enthusiasm. But the banks were reluctant to increase their exposure, and the governments thought that they might be able to postpone austerity programs for as long as possible. Everyone started looking to the other parties for effective action.

In the first year of the Baker Plan's operations, even the World Bank—of the three groups of agents the most altruistic and the least committed to the defense of specific interests—was cutting back its loans to developing countries. The choice of fifteen countries to be covered by the plan also excited controversy: why exclude Egypt, Algeria, Indonesia, or South Korea (all highly indebted—South Korea, for instance, had a debt of $44 billion at the end of 1984), but include Bolivia and Uruguay (with debts of only $3 billion each)? The answer almost certainly lies in the plan's political dimensions: it forms part of the United States's Latin American policy.

On the other hand, the more chaotic and less formally structured a plan is, and the more it resembles muddling through, the less the chances are of such opposition and such paralysis. This is why partial and once-off reschedulings—which most of the actors in practice realize will need to be repeated frequently—may actually offer more hope than a more dramatic settlement. In order to make sure of the next rescheduling, the debtor needs to implement an adjustment program so as to make sure of larger export surpluses. Equally, the creditor banks agree to maintain credit levels, and even to give some new loans in order to facilitate the adjustment process.

It is true that these short-term operations—which became after 1982 the normal way of dealing with debts—required an immense (and sometimes impossible) amount of paperwork on the part of the partici-



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pating banks and governments. It is also correct that such individual negotiations do not appear so dramatic, or so calculated to solve what has become a global problem. And there is a real weakness in that these deals still depend on the operation of sovereign states as borrowers.

The 1980s have shown that sovereign borrowers impose heavy costs not only on the banks, but—perhaps more tragically—on their own peoples. The irony is that, in the face of considerable nervousness on the part of their creditors, borrowers have made heroic efforts to repay loans, at a high social and political cost. Paying off debts and keeping up service requires increasing exports, cutting imports, and accepting lower growth rates or even falls in output levels.

In Poland, although the government is too politically vulnerable to risk the severe deflationary squeeze that would be needed to end the debt problem, since 1983 there have been modest balance of trade surpluses. Latin American economies have shrunk since the 1970s under the burden of making debt service payments. Between 1981 and 1986, per-capita income in Mexico fell 10 percent, in Argentina by 16 percent, and in Bolivia by a staggering 27 percent. In poor countries with highly unequal distributions of wealth, the disadvantaged usually suffer most. At the same time, poor economic growth disappoints middle-class expectations and helps to produce a radicalized intelligentsia. Debts are likely to produce political dynamite.

So "sovereign debt" has resulted in a massive fall in living standards in borrowing countries that have found it impossible to escape the debt trap. Here, however, and at last, the past holds a remedy: for once, history offers an encouraging model rather than a grim warning of disaster.

How much more humane the nineteenth century was than the twentieth century in its handling of international capital movements! During the nineteenth century, there was a great deal of overseas lending to North and South America, to Russia, and the Ottoman Empire, usually to build railways. The new lines were usually paid for by bond issues of private companies sold to private individuals in France, Belgium, and Britain.

Frequently, the railway companies found that their expectations were overly optimistic and that they were unable to pay interest on the bonds. Individual investors were ruined: the railways of the world were paid for by a great deal of Victorian heartbreak. There were certainly years of financial crisis—1857, 1873, and 1890—but the private nature of the debt ensured that the problems were compartmentalized, and the costs shared out in a politically uncontentious way. And, in the end, the railway lines were in place and carried goods and people. The developing countries then paid a lower price than they do now, when they are



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trapped by government debts that cannot be repudiated so easily, government debts whose repudiation costs so much politically.

There is often less to show for the loans of the 1970s, which were used to finance budget deficits, armaments spending, maintenance of living standards among politically influential groups, or quite simply capital flight (so that the fruits of many bank loans of the 1970s are to be seen in real-estate holdings in Florida). At the same time, the political intractability of the debt problem fuels nationalism and increases international tensions. In the modern world, the debt crisis is threatening to bankrupt bankers: and it certainly has already poisoned politics.

Is it possible to move back to the healthy model of the nineteenth century? One of the most promising recent developments has been the trading of discounted loans (the discounts go up to 80 percent in the case of the Peruvian loans—a striking indication of the extent of the loss of confidence). Sometimes these securities are bought by multinational companies, sold to the debtor governments, and the proceeds used to extend equity participations in the country concerned. Such equity participations help to guarantee a more productive use of imported capital, and one that will benefit the national economy of the borrowing country. At present, however, the volume of these transactions is still small—it is estimated at just over one billion dollars (compared with a total of $400 billion owed by developing countries to foreign creditors).

Nevertheless, the process shows a way of reducing the level of outstanding sovereign debt and of reducing the political sensitivity of the debt issue. If states appear to be directly involved—and once taxpayers in the borrowing country work out that they are having to pay directly for the servicing of foreign debt, and that they are subsidizing fat cats and capitalist hyenas in New York—there is an immediately obvious clash of interests.

The more debt is lumped together, the more we develop allergic, self-pitying, and (in international relations) nationalistic reactions. This was the reaction of the great state borrowers of early modern Europe, Spain, and then France. If, on the other hand, we have smaller quantities, individualized parcels of carefully differentiated debt, we are much more likely to be able to come to terms with each other.

Large-scale plans polarize politics. They make people think that there is someone to blame. The more we think about the world debt crisis in big terms (which may excite academics because of a bogus air of being more intellectually exciting)—terms such as North-South conflicts, "dependency theories"—the more we are likely to stop making any real steps toward solving the crisis. In fact, crises of this sort are better treated by not trying to solve them with one stroke, but rather by taking small-scale, and politically much less contentious issues, stage by stage.



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# *Waiting*

JANE O. WAYNE

Waiting for her
we used to rummage through the drawers
in the living room, making chains
out of paper clips, pleating
old papers into fans. Sometimes
we would dent the dough-soft
cushions on the couch,
would watch them rise.

While someone else cleaned the house,
we would take knickknacks
from the coffee table, arranging them
instead of toys on the carpet,
or leaning cards on cards
we built those flat-roofed houses
that fluttered to the floor, collapsed
our card-thin concentration.

No one taught us. We learned
the physics of that room ourselves,
those aimless specks in light,
our fingerprints on dusty sills. Day by day,
we learned all the properties of waiting—
how it drags a strip of light slowly
over the wallpaper, how like the summer heat
it can't be fanned away.

JANE O. WAYNE teaches creative writing at Webster College in St. Louis, Missouri. Her work has appeared in *Poetry*, the *Massachusetts Review*, and other journals, and she is the author of *Looking Both Ways*, a book of poems.



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# Tot Sociology

## Or What Happened to History in the Grade Schools

DIANE RAVITCH

ABOUT THREE YEARS AGO, I began to research the condition of history instruction in the public schools. Initially, I wrongly assumed that each state devised its own sequence of courses. As I examined the curriculum in different states, I came to realize that, with limited variations, there exists a national curriculum in the social studies. Regardless of the state or the school district, children in kindergarten and the first three grades study home, family, neighbors, and the local community; children in fourth grade study state history; children in fifth, eighth, and eleventh grades study American history; high school seniors study American government, economics, and civics. The content of the social studies in the other grades varies, although the typical pattern is supposed to include world cultures in sixth grade; world geography in seventh grade; civics or world cultures in ninth grade; world history in tenth grade. The courses in the sixth, seventh, ninth, and tenth grades may or may not be offered, and they may be replaced by one of the social sciences or electives or eliminated altogether, depending on the requirements of the individual state or local district.

The more closely I examined the social studies curriculum, the more my attention was drawn to the curious nature of the early grades, which is virtually content-free. In kindergarten, first grade, second grade, and third grade, the social studies curriculum is overwhelmingly sociological and economic. These four years are organized around the study of the social relationships within the home, the school, the neighborhood, and the local community. Behind this curriculum is a welter of dubious assumptions. Immersion in the sociology and economics of the child's own world is supposed to build the child's self-esteem (because she studies herself and her own family), socialize her as a member of the

DIANE RAVITCH, adjunct professor of history and education at Teachers College, Columbia University, is the author of *The Schools We Deserve* and *The Troubled Crusade: American Education, 1945–1980.*



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community, prepare her to participate in political activities, and develop her awareness of economic interdependence (by learning that the farmer grows wheat for bread, which is processed by someone else, baked by someone else, and delivered to the neighborhood grocery store by someone else). None of these assumptions has ever been empirically tested; very likely it would be impossible to do so, other than to note that most elite private schools have a curriculum for these grades that reaches beyond the child's immediate experience to the study of mythology, other cultures, and biographies of significant people.

This curriculum of "me, my family, my school, my community" now dominates the early grades in American public education. In California, the K–3 sequence issued by the State Department of Education in 1981 includes the following content: in kindergarten, children study "Myself and Others in My World"; in first grade, "People at Home and at School"; in second grade, "People as Members of Groups," emphasizing "norms, roles and responsibilities"; in third grade, "People as Members of Communities," emphasizing social interactions in group life. This "scope and sequence" defines the social studies of the first four grades: It contains no mythology, legends, biographies, hero tales, or great events in the life of this nation or any other. It is tot sociology.

The same pattern can be seen in the draft scope and sequence published by the National Council of Social Studies (the national organization of social studies professionals) in 1984. The NCSS proposed the following program for the early grades:

*Kindergarten—Awareness of Self in a Social Setting*

The major thrust of the kindergarten program should be to provide socialization experiences that will help children bridge their home life with the group life of the school. . . .

*Grade I—The Individual in Primary Social Groups: Understanding School and Family Life*

The socialization to school begun in kindergarten should be continued and extended in first grade. Children can learn the specialized roles of school personnel as an example of division of labor. Family life and structure, including variations of family structures, should be included, as well as roles of family members. Essential activities of a family in meeting basic material and psychological needs should be stressed. . . .

*Grade II—Meeting Basic Needs in Nearby Social Groups: The Neighborhood*

Meeting basic requirements of living in nearby social groups should be the central theme in second grade. The study of social functions such as education, production, consumption, communication, and transportation in a neighborhood context is appropriate as children develop an understanding and appreciation of people in groups. . . .

*Grade III—Sharing Earth-Space with Others: The Community*

The community in a global setting is the focus of study at the third-grade level.



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The concept of community needs to be extended beyond the limits of the local neighborhood. Social functions such as production, transportation, communication, distribution, and government, including their international connections, should be stressed. . . .

So widespread is this pattern in American public schools that one might assume that this particular sequence represents the accumulated wisdom of generations of educational research. Teachers believe that this sequence is there because it has always been there. Those professionally responsible for developing curricula believe that this pattern rests on a foundation of cognitive and developmental research. In fact, these assumptions are not true. The present pattern in the early primary grades has not always been there; and it is not derived from research into child development or cognitive psychology. As far as I can tell, it is there because no one has questioned why it is there. It persists today because it is the status quo, the traditional approach; it survives because of a circular assumption that it wouldn't be there unless there was a very good reason for it to be there. While other parts of the social studies curriculum have been debated and revised over the past generation, the early grades have escaped scrutiny.

The present K–3 curriculum is an innovation of the past fifty years. It was introduced in the 1930s, as part of a new approach to the teaching of social studies. At the same time, historical literature and imaginative historical activities were ousted from the curriculum of the early grades. All of the teacher training textbooks that I have examined endorse this sequence of content without suggesting alternative approaches for the early grades.

During the 1920s and 1930s, progressive educators led a national curriculum revision movement; at least thirty-seven states and hundreds of cities revised their school curricula, in accordance with progressive principles. (I have described this movement in my book *The Troubled Crusade: American Education, 1945–1980.*) Some progressive educators wanted to broaden the curriculum in response to the growing numbers of "nonacademic" students in high school; the "social reconstructionist" wing of progressive education wanted the schools to play a leading role as an agency of social and political reform. The latter group (centered at Columbia Teachers College) agreed that the era of individualism was finished, and a new collectivist age was struggling to be born; within the curriculum, the social studies portion was expected to prepare the citizens of the future for lives of interdependence and democratic collectivism. The common goal of progressive educators, whatever their political orientation, was to make the curriculum less academic, more utilitarian, less "subject-centered," and more closely related to students' interests and experiences. The writings by such progressive educators as



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William Kilpatrick, Harold Rugg, and John Dewey encouraged school officials to make their curricula more dynamic, more realistically connected to the social, economic, and political problems of the nation.

One of the most ambitious curriculum revision efforts took place in Virginia, where an innovative social studies curriculum was launched. The State Consultant on the Social Studies was Paul Hanna, who received his doctorate at Columbia Teachers College in 1929 for a study of problem solving in arithmetic. (Hanna later became a prominent and highly regarded professor of education at Stanford University.) Hanna was the best-known advocate of the new social studies curriculum, and textbooks today credit him as its originator.

The new curriculum in Virginia was vintage progressive education in that it sought to replace traditional subject matter with real-life problem solving. The purpose of the new curriculum, Hanna wrote, was twofold: "(1) To direct children in experiencing a realistic understanding and appreciation of human relations; (2) To permit children to participate in improving human relations." It was organized around what Hanna called "unitary life experiences" rather than such traditional subject matter as history, civics, and geography. The emphasis throughout the Virginia curriculum was on "major social functions," such as production, distribution, consumption, conservation, transportation and communication, exploration and settlement, education, recreation, extension of freedom, aesthetic expression, and religious expression. Grade one was devoted to "home and school life—individual adjustment to the immediate environment"; grade two was devoted to "community life—adaptations to neighborhood relationships"; grade three was "adaptations of life to environmental forces of nature—typical communities living under contrasting conditions of topography, climate, etc."; and grade four was "adaptations of life to advancing physical frontiers—the story of man's terrestrial exploration and settlement."

The new social studies curriculum eventually came to be known as "expanding environments," or "expanding horizons," or "expanding communities of men" (Hanna's favored term). The content in the early grades was built around the child, the family, the neighborhood, and the community. The rationale for this approach was that the child should begin his studies of society with what he knows best, building from the known to the unknown, from himself and his family to the larger community, city, state, nation, and, ultimately, the world. In the early grades, children learned about the functions of police officers, fire fighters, postal workers, and other community officials; they learned how food gets to the supermarket and what kinds of work people in their community do.

This curricular approach was not completely new. Since the late



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nineteenth century, American public schools had taught about the neighborhood and the local community and called it either civics or "home geography." Civics and home geography in the early grades were taught as part of an overall curriculum that included history, taught at a level appropriate for small children. History in the early grades was taught primarily through stories, biographies, mythology, folktales, and creative activities.

The "expanding environments" curriculum in the early grades dropped the historical part of the social studies curriculum and replaced it with a sociological and economic emphasis on home, school, and community. In textbooks, this curriculum is often depicted as a series of concentric circles, beginning with the child, his family, his neighborhood, his community, his region, his nation, his hemisphere, and, at last, the world.

At the time the new curriculum was organized, the country was in the depths of the Depression. Hanna argued that children had an obligation to make a contribution to the solution of the great social and economic problems of the nation, not by merely understanding them, but through their social participation. In his first public description of the new approach in 1934, he wrote, "Children, with adults, need to attack the problem of raising the standard of living, of increasing the amount of food, shelter, clothing, recreation, and education of the members of their own families and their local communities; they need to have experiences in governing themselves in and out of school; and they need experiences in general improvement of the life of the social group." The following year, Hanna lauded the idea of "children as community builders," and urged that children be enlisted as active agents in the cooperative solution of community problems.

Hanna realized that other educators did not agree with his insistence on social experience as the fulcrum of the young child's social studies curriculum. Indeed, not even all *progressive* educators agreed with this program to reconstruct the elementary social studies program. In a 1935 article entitled "Romance or Reality: A Curriculum Problem," published in *Progressive Education*, Hanna criticized the pedagogical approach of other progressive educators as "romantic." Hanna did not deny that young children loved what he called the romantic curriculum, which was grounded in history and literature. In the curriculum of the romantics, Hanna wrote,

> [children] spend many happy hours reliving the days of old when knights were bold and rode through the land in search of great adventure. They participate in many creative activities. They draw and paint the symbols of heraldry, dance the festivals of historic peasant folk, etc. These children in their imaginations become courageous, sea-faring men of the north countries, construct small



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models of picturesque boats and again sail unknown seas to find new lands. Or these pupils imagine themselves to be Athenians or Romans living in the Golden Age of art, architecture, or philosophy. And many of them become pantalooned Dutch children, clumping along in wooden shoes and raising beds of tulips.

"It is true," Hanna acknowledged, "that these children live a happy life for the few hours they spend in school—dancing, singing, painting, reading, writing, dramatizing, modelling, and doing a score of similarly interesting creative activities." But the fact that children were joyful about reliving the past through their games and activities did not strike Hanna as an adequate recommendation for this approach. Even though the children were admittedly "happy and joyful," these children in the first three grades were failing to "face the realities of this world in which we live—they escape, they retreat to a romantic realm of the yesterday." Because the nation was in an economic crisis of vast proportions, there was no time for romantic escapism; these first, second, and third graders had to learn to contribute to the good of society.

Although textbooks and dissertations regularly credit Hanna as the author of the expanding environments concept, in truth he was not so much the creator of the concept as he was the best proponent of the ideas that were widely shared among progressive educators in the 1930s, particularly in his emphasis on everyday life, social-mindedness, realistic problems, and problem solving. His suggestions were readily adopted because they were located in the mainstream of progressive thought. His proposals represented the culmination of curricular trends that had been expressed in the 1916 report by the Committee on the Social Studies, which has long been considered the birth certificate of the social studies field. That report sought to make social studies in secondary schools more life-like, more responsive to the needs of society, and less academic. However, the authors of the 1916 report never contemplated the elimination of historical content from the early grades. In fact, the 1916 report specifically endorsed elementary curricula in Philadelphia and Indianapolis that included a rich array of hero stories from the ancient and modern world.

Nonetheless, the expanding environments approach was an idea whose time had come, because it so well captured the social spirit of progressive education. In 1934, the American Historical Association's Commission on the Social Studies recommended that "instruction in the social sciences should begin in the earliest years of schooling, not with the life and institutions of some people remote in time, space, and cultural development, but with the life and institutions of the surrounding community—the simple social relationships of the family and the neighborhood and the modes of providing food, clothing, shelter, medical care, education, recreation, cultural opportunities and security of



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person." However, the AHA recommendations went further; they proposed that the child "acquire a stock of ideas which would enable him to go beyond the immediate in time and space," and that the elementary school should "acquaint the child as fully as possible with the evolution of American culture—local and national—and to some extent with the origins of American culture in the Western world."

By the 1940s, the expanding environments approach to the early elementary grades had been adopted in almost every state and school district. It is today the universal curriculum of the elementary school. Why was it so readily adopted? Within the education profession, it was associated with modern thought and forward-looking professionalism. Pedagogical textbooks, in the forefront of the reaction against traditionalism, embraced it as the way that social studies must be taught in the early years. Perhaps educators believed that the introduction of a sociological approach in the early grades would demonstrate that educators were shouldering their part of the burden during the Depression. Later, the rationalizations for the approach would change with the times; in the 1950s, expanding environments was justified as a linchpin in the teaching of citizenship and community responsibility. By the 1960s and 1970s, the rationalization became psychological, and it was asserted that children would build self-esteem by learning about themselves first.

It is important to recall that the expanding environments approach was established not as a result of the findings of cognitive or developmental psychology, but as a result of specific social and political values. The psychological claims on its behalf have never been tested; in *The Uses of Enchantment*, Bruno Bettelheim challenged the psychological premises of the expanding environments approach. Bettelheim contends that classic folktales and fairy tales and hero stories help children live better with their existential anxieties and dilemmas; further, they help children gain a surer and more confident sense of themselves by enabling them to identify with heroes who have struggled against life's difficulties and emerged victorious. The realism of most elementary readers, Bettelheim argues, is banal, and stories about everyday reality lack the power to address children's deepest emotional and psychological needs. The psychological function of fantasy, myth, fairy tale, and hero stories is vital, Bettelheim contends, for children in contemporary society:

> Today children no longer grow up within the security of an extended family, or of a well-integrated community. Therefore, even more than at the times fairy tales were invented, it is important to provide the modern child with images of heroes who have to go out into the world all by themselves and who, although originally ignorant of the ultimate things, find secure places in the world by following their right way with deep inner confidence.



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What curriculum did expanding environments replace in the early grades? The celebratory histories of progressive education would have us believe that children had been liberated by an innovative curriculum that permitted them to visit the supermarket and the post office. But from what had they been liberated? Before the advent of expanding environments, there was an elementary school curriculum for the early grades in history, geography, and civics. It differed from one school district to the next, but there was a common spirit in its essentials, an intention to introduce children to exciting stories of important events and significant individuals and to provide them with a basic historical and cultural vocabulary.

The curriculum of many school districts showed the influence of the *1909 report of the Committee of Eight of the American Historical* Association. This Committee laid out a highly specific curriculum for the study of history in the elementary schools. The Committee's proposed elementary curriculum was built around American history. "Our aim," they wrote, "is to explain the America of to-day, its civilization, its institutions and its traditions." The Committee had no illusions about teaching formal history in the early grades; instead, they expected that children would receive "definite impressions that may be conveyed to them by means of pictures, descriptions, and illustrative stories. . . ."

The Committee's proposals organized what was already commonplace in most American schools into a regular pattern. In the first three grades, the Committee recommended the teaching of Indian life and legends, stories about Columbus, George Washington and other heroes, heroes of other lands, the celebration of national, state, and local holidays, and the stories evoked by the holidays. Thanksgiving became a time to learn about the Pilgrims; Memorial Day was time to learn about the Civil War. The Committee endorsed the use of narrative history: "On a large scale, there should prevail, it seems to us, the method that characterizes the good story teller."

Until expanding environments managed to push historical materials out of the social studies curriculum, children in the early grades in most public schools learned about primitive peoples, heroes, myths, biographies, poems, national holidays, fairy tales, and legends. The story of Robinson Crusoe and study of Indian life were particular favorites. Stories about explorers, pioneer life, American heroes (especially Washington and Lincoln), and famous events in American history were staples of the first three grades. The line between historical literature and general literature was virtually nonexistent. Teacher guides emphasized the importance of telling stories to the children in the teacher's own voice. Most children read (or listened to) the Greek and Roman myths, and in many districts children read myths and folklore from "the oriental



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nations," "the Teutonic peoples," and elsewhere. The third grade in the public schools of Philadelphia studied "heroes of legend and history," including "Joseph; Moses; David; Ulysses; Alexander; Horatius; Cincinnatus; Siegfried; Arthur; Roland; Alfred the Great; Richard the Lion Hearted; Robert Bruce; William Tell; Joan of Arc; Peter the Great; Florence Nightingale."

In addition to the stories and historical literature that were found in every school's curriculum, many districts offered civics instruction to children in the early grades. Either as civics or as home geography, children learned about home, school, and the local community. In the home geography course, children learned about occupations and industries, as well as about nature study, the seasons, and the weather. In Indiana, third graders discussed how cities dispose of rubbish and sewage; the duties of local health officers; the importance of clean food, pure water, and fire protection.

History as a good story is not a bad approach to take with children aged five, six, seven, and eight years. History as an opportunity to exercise the imagination and live in another era is also a good approach for very young children. The proof of the pudding, as advocates of the new approach recognized fifty years ago, is that children *enjoy* it; they learn painlessly when their lively minds and their sense of romance and adventure are engaged. What is more, the kind of curriculum that pre-dated expanding environments prepared children for the study of history and literature in the later grades.

Today, children in most American public schools do not read fairy tales, myths, folklore, legends, sagas, historical adventure stories, or biographies of great men and women unless the teacher introduces them during reading period. However, we know from recent studies of reading instruction that current reading methods depend almost entirely on basal readers, a species of textbook containing simple stories about ordinary children, families, and neighborhoods. With rare exceptions, the basal readers do not contain rich historical and literary content.

In the course of my research, I was told by many educators that the present K–3 curriculum is based on years of educational research. No one was able to point to any specific research, but they assumed that it was validated by the developmental studies of Jean Piaget. Piaget's work, however, was never cited when expanding environments was introduced or popularized. In fact, Piagetian theory permits teachers to teach virtually *any* content so long as they proceed from the concrete to the abstract. Following Piaget, teachers can (and do) teach young children about ancient Egypt or the life of cavemen or virtually anything else; Piagetian theory is about how children learn, not what they are taught.

In the face of persisting claims by curriculum developers and super-



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visors that the expanding environments curriculum is grounded in research, I circulated an earlier version of this article (which I delivered in a different form as a paper at the annual meeting of the Organization of American Historians) to a dozen leading scholars in the fields of cognitive psychology, child development, and curriculum theory. None knew of any research justifying the expanding environments approach; none defended it. All deplored the absence of historical and cultural content in the early grades.

Jerome Bruner wrote that "there is little beyond ideology to commend the [expanding environments] program and its endlessly bland versions. Whatever we know about memory, thought, passion, or any other worthy human process tells us that it is not the known and the settled but the unknown and the unsettled that provokes the use of mind, the awakening of consciousness." The current approach, he observed, ignores the fact that "what most grips the child are tales of trickery, deceit, and cleverness—be it in Little Red Riding Hood or in folktales generally. . . . It is inconceivable to me that one could grow up and feel fully in the world without a sense of history . . . without the imagery of the great turning points that created the present."

Joseph Adelson, professor of psychology at the University of Michigan and co-director of its psychological clinic, wrote to confirm my hunch that "there is nothing in cognitive science, or in developmental research, which supports the present way of doing things. In fact, I'm quite convinced you could turn the sequence on its head, going from the community to 'myself,' without its making much of a difference. Furthermore, the current curriculum is really quite vapid and seems to induce a considerable degree of boredom, at least among the children I have seen exposed to it."

Philip Phenix, professor emeritus at Teachers College, a highly regarded philosopher of education, commented that "a largely social science oriented curriculum emphasizing sociology and economics seems to me ill-suited to the needs of young children." The heart of the problem, he writes, lies with the dogmatic adherence to the expanding environments model as the basis of the K–3 curriculum:

> The self/family/community/region progression is presumably based on the notion that learning must proceed within the context of the known and familiar and only gradually move out into the larger domains of the unknown and unfamiliar, as the child expands his or her experience. But such a view seems to me a recipe for boredom and sterility, doing poor justice to the expansive capacities of the human mind. Although teaching must obviously take account of where the student is, the whole purpose of education is to enlarge experience by introducing new experiences far, far beyond where the child starts. The curious, cautious, timid presumption that the limits of expansion are defined in any one grade year



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by the spatial boundaries defining the expanding boundaries dogma is wholly without warrant. Young children are quite capable of, and deeply interested in, widening their horizons to the whole universe of space and time and even far beyond that into the world of the imaginary. And all this from Kindergarten years, or even before!

The responses that I received included repeated references to the "vacuousness" and the "sterility" of the content offered to young children in their social studies classes. Imagine the plight of the typical first grader: She has seen television programs about space flight, wars, terrorism, foreign countries, and national elections, but her social studies textbook is about neighborhood helpers and family roles. No wonder surveys have repeatedly found that children consider social studies their least interesting subject and that the time allotted to social studies in the early grades has steadily diminished.

What do elite private schools do? At most private schools, social studies is closely correlated with literature and, in some cases, with science instruction. At Milton Academy in Massachusetts, for example, the social studies course for the second grade is devoted to a study of "the ocean" in the first semester, and to China in the second semester, with the children learning about China's geography, folktales, drama, riddles, and calligraphy. In third grade, the theme for the year is "Explorers and Exploring," which provides an opportunity to study the Vikings, Norse myths, and map skills in the first semester; then to study American Indians, their religion, mythology, and art, in the second semester.

Other private schools introduce children in the K–3 grades to units on the cavemen, Eskimos, Australian aborigines, explorers and pioneers of early America, American colonial life, American heroes and legends, the prairie culture of nineteenth-century America, the myths and legends of ancient civilizations (especially Sumerian, Hebrew, Greek, and Roman). It can probably be safely assumed that the children in these schools do not suffer an absence of self-esteem and do learn how to cooperate with others in group activities and do eventually learn how to take an active part in civic and political affairs of their community. Very likely the main difference between them and their contemporaries in the typical public school program is that the child in private school has a far more interesting immersion in history, literature, and art in the early grades and consequently develops a far broader knowledge of other cultures as well as his own.

The disappearance of historical and cultural content in the early grades in American public education bears on the issue that E. D. Hirsch, Jr., has raised in his writings on "cultural literacy." (See "Cultural Literacy," by E. D. Hirsch, Jr., THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR,



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Spring 1983.) Cultural literacy is the background knowledge that a literate person has available to him as he goes through daily life. Cultural literacy is a fluid concept, dependent on time and place. As Hirsch explains it, a person can be quite capable of reading a language, yet so ignorant of common references and allusions that he cannot understand stories in the daily press. A great deal of the background knowledge that most adults take for granted—knowledge of myths, legends, fairy tales, tall tales, historical events and persons, folktales and stories, heroes and villains—was once learned in the early grades. Except in elite private schools and the homes of highly motivated parents, children are no longer reading or hearing the stories that are deeply woven into Western literature and history. They are more likely to read about Mr. T than about Martin Luther King, Jr., more likely to hear about Madonna than about Madame Curie, more likely to celebrate the exploits of Rambo than those of George Washington and Thomas Jefferson.

There is nothing inevitable or irreversible about the present state of affairs. It ought to be the rule, rather than the exception, that young children listen to, read, act out, and discuss fairy tales, myths, legends, folklore, heroic adventures, legends, biographies, and history stories. The teachers who bring "real books" into the classrooms should be typical, not mavericks. But attention must be paid by an intelligent, informed, and persistent public, or the democratic culture that we claim to prize will be beyond our reach.

*Robert Lumiansky*

*1913–1987*

*Consulting Editor,* THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR, *1977–1979*



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# Remembering Jacques Maritain

WALLACE FOWLIE

ONLY TWICE IN MY VERY LONG CAREER as a French teacher have I given a public lecture on Jacques Maritain. Forty years ago, soon after the beginning of my career, I spoke to the Renascence Society in Manhattan, and in December 1985 I spoke from personal notes on my relationship with Jacques to members of the Maritain Association in Atlanta. In that audience there were several former students and friends. The name of Jacques Maritain had counted in our friendship, and I reminded them that my friendship with Jacques had preceded by many years my friendship with them.

Longevity was the explanation of this state of affairs. My first meeting with Jacques Maritain took place more than half a century earlier, at the very beginning of my career. I was trying to tell them that I held a record, memories that went back further in time than their memories, memories of Jacques that are inextricably tied in with a few names of poets: symbolist poets of France, and Dante and T. S. Eliot, precisely those poets I have been trying to teach to American students during the past fifty years.

The history of that record I hold, which put me in a special spotlight I enjoyed in that Atlanta meeting, is made up of phases. As I mentioned them in an effort of recollection, my listeners might have believed them chance encounters, chance happenings, juxtapositions of the same names that return persistently. But I do not really believe in chance. Chance does not explain the pattern, the design of my life, which I am still trying to see and understand.

The name of Jacques Maritain was never mentioned in any of the college courses I took as an undergraduate. Two of my professors might have referred to him—André Morize and Irving Babbitt—but they never did. However, in 1932–33, when I was a graduate student at Harvard and an instructor in French there, I heard Jacques's name first mentioned in

WALLACE FOWLIE, professor of French at Duke University, is the author of, most recently, *Sites: A Third Memoir*; *Characters from Proust: Poems*; and *Aubade: A Teacher's Notebook*.



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a classroom—by T. S. Eliot. It was the year of Eliot's Charles Eliot Norton Lectures. His contract called for him to give, in addition to the six public lectures, a course, limited to fifteen students, on English literature between 1890 and 1930. I had the privilege of taking that course. The reference Eliot made to Maritain was related to a somewhat critical attitude toward nineteenth-century French literature, and especially toward romanticism. During my senior year at Harvard, 1929–30, I had taken a famous course by Irving Babbitt called Rousseau and Romanticism, in which Babbitt, with whom Eliot had studied and about whom he had written an important essay, had been more vehemently hostile than Eliot to the entire nineteenth century in France, to romanticism at the beginning of the century, and to the movement at the end of the century that, with scorn in his voice, Babbitt called "decadence," and that, like romanticism, he traced back to Jean-Jacques Rousseau.

A few years later, in 1932, Eliot, more gentle, more soft-toned than Babbitt, spoke, in that class I attended, of the development of positivism in France in the nineteenth century. It was at that moment he spoke of Jacques Maritain, of Neo-Thomism, and of its efforts to counteract positivism.

In addition to his public lectures and his class of fifteen students, Eliot had to receive for tea every Wednesday afternoon in his rooms in Eliot House the fifteen members of his class. At those teas, which we never missed, many of the students made bold to ask about the meaning of lines in Eliot's poems, especially lines from *Ash Wednesday*, which had just been published in 1930. Those questions on the meaning of specific lines Mr. Eliot never answered.

On one of those semi-social occasions, I brought up the name of Maritain, which was new to me, and asked Eliot what book of his I should read. His answer came quickly: "Rather than reading Maritain's first book, on Bergson, I recommend *Art et scolastique*." The following morning I discovered it was not yet in Widener Library, and so I ordered a copy for myself from Paris.

At another Wednesday tea, somewhat in my role of French major (the other students were all English majors), I asked Eliot what French authors of the nineteenth century we could read without being "contaminated." That was one of Babbitt's favorite words, and I felt sure Eliot would recognize it. He did, and smiled as he answered. "I know where you got that word." What he said then was an important answer for me: "Read Mallarmé and those poets who come after Mallarmé."

When my copy of *Art et scolastique* reached me (it was the second edition of 1927), there I found Mallarmé's name and those poets who followed Mallarmé. I must have taken Eliot's advice to heart, because



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today, a half century later, I am still working on *Prose pour des Esseintes* of Mallarmé and *Art et scolastique* of Maritain.

By this time in my college career, as might be guessed, this cluster of names was causing bewilderment in the mind of a French major who was already teaching and wondering about what subject he might be given for his doctoral dissertation. The names were: Babbitt and Rousseau, Eliot and Mallarmé, and now the new name of Jacques Maritain.

Professor Babbitt had a favorite phrase he used in denouncing the French literature of the nineteenth century, a phrase that Eliot must have heard also. Babbitt lectured in English, but this phrase he always gave in French and ascribed it to a large variety of critics. We students had decided that Babbitt had made it up himself and named as its author those critics he deemed sufficiently intelligent to have coined the phrase: *ce stupide dix-neuvième siècle*. Babbitt was a powerful teacher. He impressed upon all of us the danger, the moral danger, of reading nineteenth-century French literature.

But there was now for me one way of salvaging the century: in its poets at the end, poets Babbitt himself had probably not studied. That way had been pointed out to me by Eliot, and the poets were there, commented on by Maritain in *Art et scolastique*: Baudelaire, Mallarmé, Rimbaud, and two especially from our own century, Max Jacob and Jean Cocteau.

Even in *Art et scolastique* I saw Maritain not only as philosopher-aesthetician, but as a contemplative. During my senior year and the Eliot year at Harvard, I attended services regularly at the Anglican chapel of the Cowley Fathers in Cambridge, along the Charles River. In 1932–33 I was assigned as server at mass every Tuesday. It was an early mass, celebrated at that time in a very small chapel. Eliot was a daily communicant. I saw him, therefore, every Tuesday morning. He was often the only one present, apart from the priest and myself.

One of those Tuesday mornings was especially memorable. As always, at that mass Eliot came up to the altar step to receive communion. He received and then returned to his seat (he was the only person in the nave of the chapel), and the priest and I turned back to the altar. We heard then a heavy thud, turned around, and were startled to see Mr. Eliot flat on his stomach, his arms outstretched. I felt certain he was praying, but the priest was worried (it was far from usual behavior in an Anglican chapel), and he said: "What shall we do?" In the spirit of an organizer, I said, "Let's finish up here first." We turned back, and the priest finished his mass.

When we turned around again, Eliot was still stretched out, his face pressed against the floor. Then the Cowley father took over by saying, "He may be ill; help him up." I put my arm under Eliot's shoulder and



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he came up easily with me. There was no trouble in seating him. Never, in subsequent Wednesday teas, did he refer to that episode, which I believed to have been a religious experience.

Jacques Maritain possessed an extraordinary power of changing the lives of his friends, of uniting them with him and with one another, of opening them up to his ideas or, rather, to the ideas he served. The second phase of this narrative is my actual meeting with Jacques and the reason for the meeting.

The summer following Eliot's year at Harvard, I lived in Paris reading works largely from what is sometimes called "The Catholic renascence in French literature," works often inspired by *Art et scholastique*: Péguy, Bloy, Claudel. . . . I had been assigned a topic for my thesis, quite arbitrarily (which was the custom then), by my director, André Morize. It was the poetry of Sainte-Beuve. At that time, we were supposed to find a topic that had not been written about. When I read Sainte-Beuve's poetry, following the assignment made to me by Morize, I realized clearly why it had not been written about. I had been reading Baudelaire and Mallarmé, and feeling exalted by such poetry. At the end of that summer I was depressed with thoughts of returning to Sainte-Beuve in Cambridge.

Then a totally unexpected meeting took place that changed my life. By seeming chance, I wandered one day—it was the day before I was to take the boat home—into a new attractive bookstore on the rue Denfert-Rochereau. I had seen in the window display a new edition of Pascal's *Pensées*, edited by Henri Massis, one of the Catholic critics I had been reading that summer. A striking lady, who turned out to be the owner of the shop, waited on me, showed me the Pascal volume, and spoke so knowingly about Pascal and Henri Massis that I began asking her about other books of that nature. By then she had become aware of my interest in religious writings and asked me, "Have you read Jacques Maritain?"

I told her I had read only *Antimoderne* and *Art et scolastique*. Then came the second key question: "Do you know my brother's books?" I had to say, "Madame, I do not know who you are. I came in here by chance. Who is your brother?"

"My brother is Ernest Psichari. I am Henriette Psichari."

At that very moment in my pension room in Paris there was a copy of Psichari's *Voyage du centurion*, which I had bought and not yet read. Vaguely I remembered that Psichari had some family relationship with Ernest Renan, whom I had studied in a course on *ce stupide dix-neuvième siècle*. I asked Mme Psichari about the relationship, and she



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said: "Yes, I am the grand-daughter of Renan." I recalled then a reference to Renan in *Art et scolastique*.

She continued by saying, "I questioned you first about Maritain because he was my brother's closest friend."

At that time I was unaware of that relationship. But before I left the bookstore, I ordered the other three of Psichari's books, and asked permission to write to Henriette Psichari about them once I had returned to Cambridge. Already in my mind that morning in Paris, I was plotting an escape from Sainte-Beuve and a change of thesis subject.

However, I knew there would be a drama, a minor drama, in Cambridge and began dreading my first meeting that fall with Professor Morize. When I found myself in his office in Widener Library, I went immediately to the problem. "Is it possible for me to change the subject of my dissertation?"

"No," he said. "It's an ideal subject for you. You are interested in poetry. Sainte-Beuve's poetry has not been written about." And then, as conclusive argument, to make me squirm all the more, he added: "I have been saving this topic for you."

Then came a pause, after the explosion. "What other subject do you have in mind?"

My answer was a test for Morize. I said simply: "Ernest Psichari." After a few seconds of silence, he said (and passed the test), "You mean the grandson of Renan?"

"Yes."

"Not possible! It's much too recent a subject for Harvard. The department would never allow it."

Another pause, and then a second objection, stronger than the first: "You'd have to get the family's permission. Psichari died at the beginning of the war." (Morize had been a captain in the French army.)

I tried not to appear too cocky, and said, "I believe I can have that permission."

"What makes you say that?"

Thereupon I told my professor the little story about the bookstore on the rue Denfert-Rochereau. And since my professor was a Frenchman, I emphasized the beauty of Mme Psichari and her erudition.

A still longer pause, and with his final words, he dismissed me: "Write for that permission, and then we'll talk."

I promptly received permission from both the sister and mother of Psichari.

The two following winters I spent a month in the home of Mme Noémi Renan, daughter of Renan and mother of Psichari. (The ladies in that family were divorced and had taken back their maiden name.) Thus



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I was able to secure the documentation I needed and enjoy the conversation at each lunch and dinner with a remarkable lady, in the very house where Ernest Psichari had lived: 16, rue Chaptal.

On my arrival the first winter, Psichari's sister and mother drew up for me a list of names of people who had known Psichari and who might be willing to talk with me. At the top of the list, as the friend who knew Psichari the best, was the name of Jacques Maritain.

This was a very generous suggestion because Psichari's sister and the mother were not at all in accord with Maritain. Noémi Renan was very close to the thought and the convictions, and even the style in her speech, of her famous father. Henriette Psichari often spoke strongly against Maritain's philosophy and political convictions. Both were convinced that Maritain was responsible for Psichari's conversion, which they deplored. However, they both urged me to see him by claiming he was the principal key to my research. I therefore wrote to Maritain at the Meudon address, 10, avenue du Parc, and received an answer, which was an appointment for the following week.

In order to prepare for that meeting, in order to see Maritain and hear him before I met him, I attended one of his lectures in his course at the Institut Catholique: a small class, about twelve students, with whom I sat for several minutes before Maritain came in. A quiet, swift entrance, a brief prayer as we stood, and then the lesson began, or rather continued from the last meeting. It was a course based on his recently published book, *Les Degrés du savoir*, obviously a difficult book, one that needed the explanations that Maritain was giving. (Much later Henry Bars was to call *Les Degrés du savoir* Maritain's most important philosophical book.)

The lesson at the Institut Catholique was hard, but by listening to the philosopher-teacher discuss and explain isolated sentences from his own text, I was to be helped in my first encounter with Jacques the following week in Meudon. The walk from the station to 10, avenue du Parc was auspiciously sun-flooded. The house rested on the flank of the small hill overlooking Paris. The city from which I had come was there spread out, distantly veiled by smoke and haze.

I was shown into a long, sparsely furnished room. The few chairs and the table and especially the few pictures on the walls converted the natural austerity of atmosphere into a room of subtle refinement. The house seemed totally silent as soon as the maid had closed the door behind her. I walked to the end of the room to look at a very poignant sketch of a face I recognized as Baudelaire's.

After a few minutes, M. Maritain came in, closed the door behind him, and moved rapidly across the room to greet me and then sit down in a chair nearest to mine. I had seen faces resembling his in paintings by Modigliani. The broad line of the brow and the lower part of the face



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tapering to a fine point emphasized the importance, almost the autonomy, of the head. The shock of graying hair falling across the forehead and seeming to incline the face to one side, added a youthful expression to a face that belonged to no particular age.

Maritain's presence led me into myself. The questions I had prepared in my mind, and on paper, too, began to appear irrelevant, or to answer themselves. In their place, problems more exciting and central and imperative formed without my knowing precisely how. Maritain spoke of Psichari from such a reserve of memory, and with such intensity of feeling, that he had to hold himself constantly in check for fear of going far beyond the questions I, in my relative ignorance, was asking.

What he said was not the mere rehearsal of memory. He reiterated the fact that Psichari's adventure lay beyond his reach and comprehension. He minimized his own role in his friend's life and deliberately turned aside all the human and historical explanations. Since that first meeting at Meudon. I never saw Jacques's face so docile to the inner spirit. It became incandescent. The example of Psichari was an absolute for him, a pure example of God's entrance into a human being.

As soon as I brought up the name of Charles Péguy, I realized I had unwittingly broken the spell. The actual expression on Maritain's face did not alter. We were still within the framework of the same problem of God's intervention in the existences of men, but in this new case, the resisting will of a man had been stronger. Péguy was close to Maritain's heart—I never doubted that—but he had been difficult. In Psichari's own case the human drama had been resolved and had changed into what Maritain called the divine drama. In Péguy's case the human drama had continued, always appropriating more depth from the life of prayer, but never completely absorbing or converting the stubbornness of the writer.

As young men, Maritain and Psichari together came under the influence of Charles Péguy. They became his friends and learned from him who was a peasant (the man who had never known how to sit in an armchair) the lessons on the dignity of work and labor. Maritain introduced Péguy to his mother, Mme Geneviève Favre, who became Péguy's best friend and guide. Every Thursday, for two years, Péguy took lunch with Mme Favre in her apartment at 149, rue de Rennes, in company with her son Jacques and his friend Ernest. Maritain listened to Péguy and learned much from his constant discussion of the people (*le peuple*) and the theme that no political crisis is ever separate from the religious crisis.

Several years later, during World War II, Maritain came to Yale while I was teaching there, to deliver a series of lectures on education. I invited him to dinner at Trumbull College, where I was resident fellow,



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and I invited also my chairman, Henri Peyre, who was anxious to meet him. The three of us ate at a small table in the college dining room. At one point Professor Peyre brought up the subject of Péguy. Very fervently, and with some justification, Peyre urged Maritain to write a book on Péguy. He claimed that there was a great need for such a book and that Maritain was the Frenchman most able to write it. Maritain closed the discussion by saying to Peyre—and there was sadness on his face and in his words—"That book I will never write." *(Ce livre-là je ne l'écrirai jamais.)*

Let me return now to the Meudon days. When I was leaving Jacques on that first semi-formal, semi-scholarly visit, he said to me: "I know that you have met, at my mother's house, my niece Eveline Garnier, of whom Raïssa and I are very fond. Come with her, whenever you wish, on any Sunday afternoon, when we receive our friends here at Meudon. Eveline knows almost everyone who comes on Sundays. She will introduce you and guide you."

I went several times, always hoping that I would at least see Jean Cocteau, Julien Green, Marc Chagall, or Georges Rouault. I never did see them at Meudon. By the time I had become, thanks to Eveline, a semi-familiar face to Jacques and Raïssa and Véra on those Sunday afternoons, Raïssa took me aside once and said: "I want you and Eveline to stay for supper tonight. We always invite five or six friends to stay on for supper after the crowd has left."

Eveline had told me about that tradition and had promised me that one Sunday night I would be invited to stay. She had said there was usually one guest of honor who became the center of attention. The star that night was Henri Ghéon, a writer of religious plays. He had just returned from a visit to Jerusalem, and during the first part of supper he spoke of his visit and announced to all of us that for dessert that night we were to have grapefruit he had brought from Jerusalem for Jacques and Raïssa. Véra, Raïssa's sister who supervised the supper, was especially delighted to have the dessert miraculously provided.

When talk about Jerusalem grapefruit subsided, Ghéon revealed a much more dramatic announcement, so serious that it shocked all of us who were assembled around the table. That morning—it was April 17, 1938, Easter morning—the wife of André Gide, Madeleine, had died. Ghéon had learned it before it had been officially announced. I can still remember the hush that fell over that group of friends. Jacques bowed his head. He was the first to articulate what was, I imagined, in everyone's mind: "What change will this death bring about in André Gide?" It might easily—given all the circumstances of Gide's life, given



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the piety of Madeleine Gide, and the estrangement in that marriage, given the day itself being Easter—provoke a major change in Gide.

During the rest of the supper, until all of us left to return to Paris, and during the train ride, conversation continued to center on Madeleine Gide's death. The news appeared in the papers the next morning. The meaning of the drama behind the death was analyzed in countless articles and books during the next three or four months, as only the French can analyze such matters. The discussion that evening in Meudon, stimulated by Henri Ghéon's announcement, in the presence of Jacques Maritain, represented for me, still a "French major" in an American university, an impressive page in the history of French literature.

In 1943, in the very midst of the war, an ardent group of Jacques's friends gathered together at the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel in New York in order to celebrate his sixtieth birthday. I was impressed not so much by the large number of people who attended the luncheon as by the variety of types of people who spoke on that occasion words of homage and felicitation. There were, among others, a woman journalist (Anne Freemantle), a college president, a Jewish painter (Marc Chagall), a Catholic priest. That day was a celebration of Jacques as friend rather than as philosopher or teacher or writer.

My thoughts that day turned back to Meudon, the gathering place of friends on Sunday afternoons. The living room was always crowded with people representing various professions: Dominicans, poets, philosophy students, dramatists, painters, grandes dames. The conversation always seemed to be about art. The sketch of Baudelaire and the pictures of Severini and Chagall on the walls helped perhaps to direct the conversation in those channels.

This theme of art and poetry brings me to the last phase of my recollections of Jacques: the war years he spent largely in New York, in his apartment at 30 Fifth Avenue. Those years in New York and later in Princeton were to culminate in the writing of *Creative Intuition in Art and Poetry* (1952), a book that was to call upon American and English poets as well as French poets to rethink their art. In the earlier works on aesthetics, *Art et scolastique*, *Frontières de la poésie*, and especially *Réponse à Jean Cocteau* of 1926, Maritain developed a doctrine close to Baudelaire's *Correspondances* and the writings of Swedenborg. This doctrine might be defined in this way: the spiritual is immanent in the real world, in what we call reality. The interchange between the material world and the spiritual world is constant, the one revealing the other, the one standing as sign of the other.

Those artists, so steadfastly admired and studied by Maritain—poets



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like Baudelaire and Rimbaud; novelists like Léon Bloy and Mauriac; the dramatist Cocteau; the composers Satie and Stravinsky—seemed to have for the philosopher one theme, one approach, in common: the incomprehensibleness of sin. The lives as well as the literary exercises of those writers were, for Maritain, tragic. He watched them on their tightrope in the glare of the circus, and learned from their courage some aspects of the meaning of our civilization today.

During the war years I was at Yale and able to come to New York whenever Jacques needed help in the translation of his essays or lectures. He was working hard on his English during those years, trying to write directly in English and to lecture in English. My visits were largely for language lessons and for revising some of the translations already done that he wanted to change. The one I liked the best was *Le Mystère d'Israël*, which ultimately became part of the book *Ransoming the Time* (1941).

During the fifties I was at Bennington College in Vermont, and I taught also at the New School in New York, and therefore came to New York every week for two nights. The study of English and American poetry was Jacques's delight, his indulgence almost. Once I reminded him that Mallarmé had studied English in order to read Poe, and pointed out that he was studying English in order to read Eliot. He had met Eliot briefly at Princeton, where he had also met Allen Tate. Along with these two poets, he was studying a third man, also at Princeton, once my colleague at Bennington: Francis Fergusson, a careful reader of Maritain, who was to write one of the most penetrating reviews of *Creative Intuition*.

At the end of our hard sessions on translations and linguistics, Jacques would turn to a few lines of Eliot and read them and ask me to read them out loud. He was curious about Eliot, curious about the depth of religious feeling in the poems. Once he asked a question, an unusual question for him to ask: "I have heard that you studied with Eliot. Would you say he is a religious man?" Rather than answer that question directly, I told Jacques the story I have just recorded here of the Tuesday morning mass in the Cowley Fathers' chapel.

At the end of the story, tears were rolling down Jacques's cheeks. He recovered quickly, smiled at me, and said: "I am going to tell you a story about myself, a comparable story. . . . The first year that President Hutchins invited me to give a course at the University of Chicago, I made arrangements to attend the earliest mass each morning at the Cathedral of the Holy Name. One morning after I received communion, I must have had the same experience, the same need that Eliot had and that you described. I stretched out, face down, at the altar rail. There were only a few people, and they had gone back to their seats. It was



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dark in the church. A janitor came by and kicked me in the side, saying, 'We don't allow drunks in this church.' He forced me to get up."

Of all the Eliot poems Jacques studied, he was the most strongly attracted to *Ash Wednesday*. It was the poem he was the most anxious to discuss, and, in particular, he was interested in the last eleven lines of the poem. On two of our sessions, he asked me to read those eleven lines to him, and he would say about them: "In those lines I hear the beauty of pure sound, such as the *poètes maudits* strove to create. The words are so clear. It is a chant, a ritualistic chant which we don't really have in the French language."

Permit me to transcribe here that passage, the ending of *Ash Wednesday*, in memory of Jacques's admiration of it, and in memory of his thoughts concerning it.

> Blessed sister, holy mother, spirit of the fountain, spirit of the garden,
> Suffer us not to mock ourselves with falsehood
> Teach us to care and not to care
> Teach us to sit still
> Even among these rocks,
> Our peace in His will
> And we among these rocks
> Sister, mother
> And spirit of the river, spirit of the sea,
> Suffer me not to be separated
>
> And let my cry come unto Thee.

At the end of one of the readings, I asked Jacques in pedantic fashion: "Do you recognize the line from Dante?" Rather than saying yes, he quoted the line in Italian: "En la sua voluntade è nostra pace."

I tried, on a few of the New York visits when there was time to look at poetry, to interest Jacques in Hart Crane, in *The Bridge*, in particular, Crane's long poem on America. I felt he might find stimulating the presentation of the cultural myth in the second part of the poem, *Ave Maria*, where Crane attempts to join the Old World and the New.

Crane's rather laborious reading of Baudelaire, and his even more laborious reading of Rimbaud, interested Jacques, but by then Princeton was taking him away from New York and Brooklyn Bridge. In Princeton he came under the strong influence of Allen Tate and Francis Fergusson, and accepted—too readily, I think—their belief that *The Bridge*, a major American poem, was also a major failure. Their theory stated that the myth behind the poem was inadequate, insufficient to sustain the long



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poem. I felt defeated in this effort of mine because I did not share the convictions of Tate and Fergusson with respect to Crane's poem.

Jacques Maritain came in his turn to enter what Péguy called "an eternal concert." The man who today would speak of appearance and reality must speak the language of ancient Greece. He who would speak of belief in One God and of temporal justice must needs speak the language of Israel. He who would speak of the Fall and of the Redemption of man will have to speak the language of the Christian Church.

Maritain's language sounded strange to men of his day—as strange as the language of other metaphysicians sounded to men of their day. But he who henceforth would speak of theocentric humanism or humanism of the Incarnation, of the hidden reserved sacramental power of the people, of the meaning of Christian freedom, will have to speak the language of Maritain.



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# *Correct Blinking*

JEAN HOLLANDER

*. . . the heavy muscles force the lids together with a crashing motion and should not be used for normal blinking.*

—From a pamphlet prepared by American Research Laboratories after a six-year study to eliminate faulty blinking.

Correct blinking occurs
not in the wink
of teller and joke,
nor in sex, innocent
or bleared by old men
and young years.

Correct blinking occurs
not in God's blindness
at sparrows dropping
nor the rider misplaced
between stirrup
and fears.

God's squint
is the dashing
of sparrows to bits
as riders are smashed in



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the incorrect crashing
of God's heavy lids.

Correct blinking occurs
innocently in infants
who are born
excellent blinkers
but fall from perfection
as vision clears.

Correct blinking occurs
in the downward motion
of the upper lid to encounter
the unmoving lower
and the cornea is watered
with our tears.

✪ JEAN HOLLANDER teaches at Trenton State College. Her work has appeared in many journals, including the *Sewanee Review*, the *Quarterly Review of Literature*, and the *New England Review*.



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# *After the Fact*

*(for Richard Hugo)*

ELIZABETH LIBBEY

You'd love it here on the porch, blue beer glass
balanced on the rail. Looking out across Eel Pond
toward early laughter from the Black Duck bar.
The lobstermen there—they'd love you at once:
your stories and that grinning scowl.
They wouldn't believe such hands
held a pencil gently or curled a knuckle down
against one corner of the yellow paper,
filling it up with poems.

I've come out here, childish, half-thinking
to find you waiting. Perhaps in among
dipping boats, the gulls. Or that orderly squad
of geese paddling along the shore from the harbor.
I've never lived by the water before. It gets
too much inside my eyes, I'm always
cupping my hands, gulping too much air
at one time. I've always wanted to be prepared.
You taught me to surprise myself in poems,
to let myself alone. And so it should be you now saying,
Let things like water be. Accept
the complication of light, of gulls cruel
in their clarity—what a poem must be.

Sit with me somewhere, anywhere, it is still light.
I remember the knot of warm where your hand
held the fishing rod; the alien



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beauty of trout fresh caught. Wait, I
remember more. But what I remember is never
exactly you, who always move forward in a jazz of towns,
a blinding love of people speaking into the world.
You could not leave yourself alone.

I'm older now, nearly as old as you when we met,
and I wish we might speak. I'd be
direct with you, you'd reassure. Here
under a clear flat sky where everything
has changed. Everything.
And not one damned cloud.

I don't know if you thought to die, or if
it took you by surprise. I feel my death
only in the occasional odd slant of light,
or in the loved one turning, turning somehow
away without intent. Let us,
old friend, sit here quietly. I just can't
drink the way we used to, and besides,
you're right: the bars are all too loud, too bright.

The time you told me Galileo's words,
you cried. The world: "And still it turns,"
no matter what's said or unsaid between friends.
But now I must speak, say what I mean. I know
you never get there, where you want to be.
But it's too early to go in. I say
it's you taught me not to be ashamed of what I love.
The gulls really have moved closer now, I'll try
not to be the first of us to speak. Take
your time. Take your time.

✪ ELIZABETH LIBBEY is the author of two books of poems, most recently *Songs of a Returning Soul.* Her work has appeared in *Poetry, The New Yorker,* and other magazines.



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# Album of the Knopfs

STANLEY KAUFFMANN

## I

The night before I went to work for Alfred A. Knopf, I broke out in hives. I was sitting in the living room, reading, when my face began to itch. We had been to a Chinese restaurant for dinner, and I wondered if I had developed some kind of allergy. I said nothing to Laura, deep in her own book. I went into the bathroom and looked. It was frightening. Before my eyes, as in a horror film, my face was reddening and was turning into crinkles, like elephant hide. I took off my shirt and saw the welts on my chest and arms. I called Laura. She was more amazed than frightened. "My goodness," she said. The idea of telephoning a doctor on a Sunday night in New York was far-fetched. Laura suggested that I soak in a hot bath to relieve the itching, then take a sleeping pill so that I could get through the night without scratching, and see how it was in the morning. By morning, it had all gone. I was doubly relieved. It would have been awkward to start a new job by calling in sick.

But I suspected, partly because of my dreams that night about starting work, that the Chinese food was not responsible. I didn't really want this job, I had to have it. I had left my last editorial job a year before, in the summer of 1958, because that small publishing house was in difficulties and couldn't afford to keep me on. I had not been worried because a London theatrical manager had taken an option on a play of mine and was talking grandly about an early production. Through the following twelve months, the grandeur and the airmail letters dwindled. In the spring of 1959 the option was dropped. I had been writing other things through the year, but the returns were small. Our savings, which we had thought of as carrying us until the play was produced, now had to carry us until I could find another publishing job. This happened fairly quickly. At one time it would have been exciting to get a job so quickly with such a prestigious house. Now, however, I had not intended to go back into publishing at all. The job was an emblem of disappointment. Therefore, I thought on that Monday morning, the hives. I shaved apprehensively, in awe of what the body can decide to do to itself. Nothing went wrong. I was ready to start.

The interviews at Knopf had probably heightened the possibility of hives. Three weeks earlier I had telephoned the editor-in-chief, Harold Strauss, who knew my name—I had been in publishing almost ten years—and had invited me to see him. When I got out of the Knopf elevator, I saw a neatly lettered small wooden sign fixed to the opposite wall: "The business hours of this establishment are Monday to Friday, 9:00 A.M. to 5:30 P.M." I had a cordial talk with Strauss, a large, bald, potbellied man who wore a dark shirt. He asked me some questions of fact and of opinion about publishing and seemed pleased with my answers. He gave me a manuscript to read, choosing it, he said, because it was unlike anything I had previously dealt with. It was A. T. W. Simeons's *Man's Presumptuous Brain*, and two days after I sent Strauss my report on it, he telephoned to say how much he liked it. Then, as I later learned, Strauss sent the manuscript to an academic who

STANLEY KAUFFMANN, film critic for *The New Republic*, has contributed five previous Albums to THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR, three of which are included in *Albums of Early Life*.



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frowned on the book. Knopf declined it, and it was published elsewhere successfully. Still, a week after Strauss's call, I was invited to lunch by two Knopf executives. A few days after the lunch, I was invited to meet Mr. and Mrs. Knopf.

I met him first. He looked impressive and had evidently taken care to look so. He had a bristling moustache and muttonchop whiskers, all white, which emphasized his big nose and ruddy complexion. He was average height, both barrel-chested and portly. He wore a rich dark suit, a white shirt, and a bright pink tie. I had heard that he usually wore odd-colored shirts. The day after our meeting, I read that just after our talk, he had gone up to Columbia University to receive an honorary degree. The white shirt was apparently his bow to formality, the pink tie his hold on his publicized personality.

His voice and speech were disappointing. He ought to have sounded more burly and more elegant. His voice was almost a whine, too thin for the size of his chest, and his accent was flat New York, quite wrong for his aspect.

We spoke amiably for a few minutes. Then Mrs. Knopf came in from her office across the way. She was short and very thin. Her thinness was incongruous with her chic. Her dyed and carefully arranged hair, her modish dress, her bangled arms made her look like an expensively attired starveling. Her eyes were gray, almost opaque, and with her wrinkled skin, they gave her a hint of the reptile. Her voice was much more attractive than his, low and warm. She was as much a grand lady as her frame would permit. She was even more amiable, markedly so. She carried the latest issue of *The New Republic*, and its cover announced an article by me on *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, which had just been published complete in the United States.

She put the magazine down without comment, sat, smoked, talked. Even though I had not wanted to come back to publishing, I felt some excitement at having moved so swiftly toward a job with a leading house that now I was chatting with the two world figures who headed the house.

What happened next I could hardly believe as I sat there witnessing it. Mr. Knopf asked my opinion on some matter of current publishing, and I answered. Mrs. Knopf made a "hmm" in her throat and said she disagreed with me. With sudden sharpness Mr. Knopf said that he thought I was absolutely right. With her own kind of sharpness, more disdainful than aggressive, she replied that she thought we were both wrong. He flushed angrily and barked at her that he knew what he was talking about, and she replied equally angrily that she knew exactly the opposite. They kept at it for about a minute. I didn't know what to do or say. I was not only a stranger, I was an applicant for a job, and my possible future employers, distinguished publishers, were carrying on like neighborhood shopkeepers who forgot themselves far enough to quarrel in front of a customer.

The quarrel subsided, with some grunting on both sides. Mr. Knopf's color subsided. They both turned back to me without a touch of embarrassment and continued to talk. Soon his telephone rang. He snapped an answer. "Send him in." In came Harold Strauss in his shirt sleeves, a letter in his hand, his glasses on the end of his nose.

"Well?" snapped Mr. Knopf again.

Strauss said he was sorry to interrupt, but this was really urgent. Mr. Knopf stuck out his hand for the letter, and with his other hand, he waved at Strauss as he looked at me. "This is Harold Strauss," he said almost venomously, "our so-called editor-in-chief."

Again I could hardly believe this remark in front of an applicant. But Strauss merely nodded at me easily as if he had been introduced without sarcasm and said that we had met. "Oh, yes," said Mr. Knopf as he whipped on his glasses to read the letter.

I took this as a cue and suggested that I leave them to their business. Mr. Knopf stuck out his large hand at me, which I shook, and thanked me for coming in. Mrs. Knopf thanked me and said she looked forward to reading my article on David. I supposed that this was D. H. Lawrence, whom they had published. I couldn't fit that fact, as well as everything else I knew about them, with their behavior this morning. I thanked her, waved at Strauss, and left.

Two days later one of the vice-presidents telephoned and said that they wanted me to start work on the following Monday. On Sunday evening I got the hives.



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## II

I plunged in. Strauss and others told me that of course anything I could contribute to the firm's list would be welcome, but I had been engaged especially for my experience with American writers, particularly novelists. Knopf was not really competitive, I was told, on the American side. In recent years their connections with American writers had slipped. I was there primarily to repair that situation.

I set up appointments with all the literary agents and magazine editors I knew and some I had never met. I wrote or telephoned suitable authors who might be available. I knew that, on any given day, a very limited number of publishable manuscripts existed and that most of them were committed elsewhere. I also knew that, in publishing, the competition is not only between houses, it is between editors in the same house. In my previous jobs, I had spent most of my time with manuscripts and with authors. Acquisition, as it was called, had largely been done by others. I felt that I had to climb an almost perpendicular rock face. I wanted to succeed, at least as much for ego satisfaction as out of dedication. I was writing a weekly article for *The New Republic,* seeing films and reading books to review for them, but I was also carrying manuscripts home because my days were busy panting after agents and authors like a dog begging for scraps. I kept telling myself that I was lucky to have found a job with a top publisher. I told Laura the same thing. She rarely contradicted me on this point because she didn't want to tug at me, but I knew that basically she was no more overjoyed than I.

I saw Mr. Knopf, and usually Mrs. Knopf, once a week at an editorial meeting in the firm's library, and I sometimes encountered them in the hall. She was friendly, in something of the manner of the hostess of a salon. He was whatever he felt like being, as he moved heavily and briskly. But I had a different sort of contact with them every day through the report folder.

This folder contained all the reports that had been written in the previous two or three days by various readers of manuscripts, including the Knopfs, along with memos by editors on forthcoming projects. The intent was to keep every editorial person aware of what others were doing. The last people to see the folder were the Knopfs.

A slip was stapled to the outside of the folder with a list of initials. Each of us had to initial in ink next to his mimeographed initials. The first time I saw the folder I noted that A. A. K. and B. W. K. were at the top of the list. When I passed the folder on to the person in the next office, I commented on the fact that the Knopfs kept so close to daily activity. He made a sound. I said it again the next day. He put down what he was reading and said it was time that I was enlightened.

Mrs. Knopf did not read, he said. She had badly damaged her eyes, according to him, by various diets she had been on from time to time. The diets had also affected her stomach so that she could hardly eat, which was why she was so thin. As for these reports, her secretary read them to her, or parts of them. If a manuscript sounded interesting, the secretary read parts of it to her, or friends read it to her at home.

"But what about her trips?" I asked. "Her scouting trips?" She was celebrated for her European jaunts. She prided herself on her French.

She had old friends in Paris and London and Rome who scouted for her, said this man, and who read samples of books and manuscripts to her. Her publishing sense, her awareness of trends and coming reputations, was as strong as ever, possibly stronger because she was now working under a handicap.

"But she doesn't behave like a person with poor sight. And no one treats her that way."

He shook his head and said that was Rule Number One. No one must ever mention it. Everyone must act as if she had really read a manuscript when she said she had. Even Mr. Knopf kept up the masquerade.

Others in the office confirmed the story. Many times in the following months I found myself with Mrs. Knopf, at meetings or in her office, carrying on the pretense. She would comment on a new author's style or on a book she had discovered in Paris, and I would make the apt response. I had known that working in this office would not be like any other, but this was almost fantasy. I felt like a courtier of a queen whose eccentricities were honored because of her triumphs.

Several times I was in front of the office building when she came out for a taxi. She



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didn't stop at the curb, as anyone else might do, to gauge traffic. She plunged five or six feet into the street with one thin, bangled arm upraised while brakes around her screeched. So far as I know, she was never injured.

My first direct dealings with Mr. Knopf were differently odd. A previous editor, discharged before I arrived, had contracted for a book by a journalist. The manuscript had come in and was, at Mr. Knopf's request, delivered to him. A few days later I got a call, a call that subsequently became familiar. His secretary said, "Will you go in to Mr. Knopf, please?" I went. He was writing something with the nib pen he always used. He waved me to a seat and dipped the pen in the inkwell. He finished, spat into the brass spittoon that he kept behind his big, handsome desk, and spoke in a friendly tone. He had read the journalist's manuscript, liked it, wanted to publish it, but wanted another eye on it before he spoke to the author. Did I know the journalist's work? Yes. Then, as I was their "American" expert, I was the person to read this thing. I was not to use the folder on this one, I was to report right to him. I said I'd try to get back to him the next day. "Don't break your neck," he said with the harshness that often tinged even his kindly remarks. "Two or three days will be fine."

I read the manuscript that night. I thought it uneven, disorganized. I made notes. The next morning I typed a long, detailed report and gave it to Mr. Knopf's secretary. About half past three I got the call to go in and see Mr. Knopf. I picked up the manuscript and went in. He was already a touch more florid than usual. He whipped his hand at a chair. I sat down and put the manuscript on the edge of his desk near me.

He shot his forefinger at me. "You've just committed the cardinal sin," he barked. I thought, of course, that he meant my disagreement with him. "Look at that manuscript," he said. "The way you put it down. The pages are not even stacked neatly. Look at the corners sticking out from the pile."

I almost laughed. It was so minuscule a vengeance for my report that I could hardly take it seriously. I wasn't heroic. I wanted to keep the job. But, at this moment and throughout my time there, I couldn't help watching his tantrums as if he were a performer or, sometimes, a case. He liked to frighten people, and many in the office were frightened of him, behaving with excessive smoothness in his presence as if to disprove their fear. I, no stranger to cowardice, was by some quirk merely observant. Before very long, he sensed this, I thought. He didn't treat me gently, but he never said anything to me half as savage as I heard him say to others.

Now as I kept from smiling, I tidied the manuscript pile and said, "Oh. Sorry." Then, like a district attorney, he pressed me with questions about the book. I had been specific in my report, and I kept referring to it. After a while he said wearily, "Very well," as if I had disappointed him deeply, "that's all."

The manuscript was returned to the journalist who did some revision but, I thought, not enough. The book, which could have been good, was published after I had gone, without much success.

## III

Everyone except secretaries called them "Alfred" and "Blanche." I was surprised when I first heard it. It seemed out of character. I always called them "Mr. Knopf" and "Mrs. Knopf," partly because it felt better in my mouth, partly out of small-boy orneriness. It was a safe impertinence. They couldn't comfortably reprove me for addressing them respectfully.

It was really to spite him, not her, that I did it, and I asked myself why. Something about my relationship to him had a strange feeling of ease, almost of closeness and recognition, even amidst the tensions he insisted on creating, a feeling that seemed to license a tease. It couldn't have been because I was doing well at the job. I was working on a novel with its author, signally talented, but the manuscript had been in the house before I arrived and had simply been assigned to me. I was telephoning away and lunching away and writing letters to everyone I could think of, with mild results. It wasn't assurance of success that gave me my ease with Mr. Knopf. I didn't know what it was until some weeks after I started there.

Every week we had those editorial meetings in the library, whose walls were lined with shelves holding one copy of every book



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the house had published. A long rectangular table filled the center of the room. Mr. Knopf sat at the head with Mrs. Knopf, when she attended or drifted in and out, at his right. At the other end, facing him, was the production manager, who always turned up with a folder eight inches thick. He was a good book manufacturer but was suavely frightened of Mr. Knopf, as he was meant to be. He brought more data than necessary because the quality of design and production were major matters in this house and he never wanted to be without an answer to Mr. Knopf's sharp questions. Along the sides of the table were the editors, the publicity man, and sometimes the treasurer of the firm.

Meetings varied in length and interest, according more to the Knopf mood than to the business in hand. He would bring a folder with him, sit, polish his glasses with his tie, a safe procedure because, however gaudy its color, it was always pure silk. Then, usually, he would begin by reading a letter from a friend or a pet author of his, meant to establish cozy atmosphere. Thus, if fireworks later erupted, he could maintain by implication that he had meant the meeting to be genial, but his editors' laziness or stupidity had spoiled it.

Sometimes he would tell us that he was going to include a part of the letter in his own newsletter. This newsletter was a Knopf specialty. It was published quarterly, as I recall, consisted of four handsomely printed pages, and was sent to booksellers and to anyone who sent a card requesting it. The newsletter contained comments on forthcoming books, on recently published books, on books of other publishers that had appealed to him, and various personal jottings. He wrote it all himself. He could write engagingly, and this quarterly communication promoted the image he wanted, a crusty but genial old aristocrat of letters, concerned only with the best and able to discern it, a guardian at the gates against the gothic future. One subject that frequently recurred in these pages, as on his house's list, was music, about which he was passionate.

These meetings demonstrated his competence. He was vastly experienced in every branch of publishing. On every problem that arose he had a quick opinion, even if it was only a specific reference to someone who could solve the problem. I discovered, through these meetings and elsewhere, that his literary taste was severely limited. That was hard to reconcile with the quality of his list until I saw that many of his famous authors had been published elsewhere first. If they were American, like Willa Cather, someone else had launched them. If they were foreign, like Thomas Mann, they had reputations abroad before the house took them on. I saw, too, that Mr. Knopf was in awe of most academics, especially of history professors, most especially professors of American history, whom he delighted to publish. In fiction and poetry and general books, he relied on the opinions of others, previous publishers or his editors. With academic books, he relied on the author's position in the field and the endorsement of other academics. Aside from his experience, I saw that his own chief resource was not great taste or intellect but huge ambition to be a great publisher. Still, that combination of experience and ambition made him powerful.

His power gave him a contradictory attitude toward his editors. He had engaged them because he thought them qualified and he needed their advice more than he admitted, but he didn't want to be threatened by them. He wanted them to succeed, or he would have looked foolish for engaging them. He also wanted them to blunder and fail, or he would not have been indispensable. At these editorial meetings, this contradiction resolved into an attitude much like that of a bank president grumblingly admitting to his tellers that they hadn't stolen much from him that week.

Often, however, he behaved as if an editor had robbed him or wanted to rob him. At one meeting early in my stay, the subject of Japanese novels came up. The house had promoted a series of Japanese authors, selected by Strauss, who had spent some time in Japan after World War Two. Strauss now proposed the translation of another Japanese novel. He had chosen the wrong moment to raise the subject.

"What! More of that stuff?" barked the florid Mr. Knopf. "Will you look at the sales record? That is, if you can read. Disaster, and all your fault. I've picked up one of those damned Japanese novels after another, and I've never been able to finish one of 'em."



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Strauss had invested a good deal of himself in that series. He paled a bit, tried to smile, turned his head sidewise. In fact the Japanese series continued for a while, but Strauss's paunchy energy about those books now looked different to us.

At another meeting another editor reported that a poet, distinguished, wanted to leave his present publisher and come to Knopf.

"Ach!" said Mr. Knopf disgustedly. "Another one of those important poets running at a loss for years. It took me thirty years before I made a dime on Wallace Stevens."

I almost laughed. It was like being at a privy council in the Vatican and hearing the pope complain about tithes from a cathedral. It was particularly funny, in an obstinate way, because the house published some poetry every year.

I don't remember an exact moment when it happened, but through occasions like these, it dawned on me why I felt at ease with Mr. Knopf. He reminded me of my father. They didn't look alike, dress or sound alike. My father, who practiced dentistry about forty blocks straight up Madison Avenue from the Knopf building, was not well off. But there were echoes and reminders, each of the other. Highest principles were taken as the decent person's norm, and egotism was taken as the due reward of such principles. Brusqueness could filter around the edges of one's behavior, outbursts of temper, because these were the prerogatives of the high-principled. Both the high principles and the self-esteem established a hierarchy in which one had to bear the responsibility of being at the top. Once, in conversation with me, Mr. Knopf gestured out his office window and referred to the people below as "mutts." Forty blocks north, my father had often made the same gesture, as he called those below "common as dirt." In New York dental societies, my father's professional reputation was as high as Mr. Knopf's in world publishing. If my father had made comparable money, he wouldn't have worn those unique shirts and ties, but, like Mr. Knopf, he would have viewed success as the least the world could do in return for his presence.

At home, as a boy and youth, I had not been able to laugh at the bullyings licensed by position. Here I was differently involved. The very fact of the reminder, the comparison, was secretly amusing.

Soon the comparison was underscored. After I had been in the office two months or so, I got the secretary's call one day and went in to see Mr. Knopf. I didn't know the reason. To my surprise, it was an invitation. Laura and I were invited to lunch on the following Sunday at the Knopf home in Purchase. Mrs. Knopf kept an apartment in town, not far from the office. Mr. Knopf, who hated the city, lived in Purchase, and Mrs. Knopf joined him on weekends. He had two cards, beautifully printed, with directions for guests, one card for those with cars, another for those who came by train and taxi. I took the latter.

The house was comfortable but not grand. They called it The Hovel, and had notepaper so engraved, because long ago a snooty English author had used that term about it. To Laura and me and the two other guests, Mr. Knopf, wearing shorts on this warm day, was completely attentive. He apologized for Mrs. Knopf who had been detained in town. He asked whether we preferred a cocktail or white wine before lunch. With evident approval, he served the white wine. When we were seated at the table, he went out on a terrace through French doors and broiled individual steaks for everyone, according to our orders. With the steaks he served a Burgundy, the best I have ever tasted, a La Tâche. After lunch he asked me and the other male guest whether we wanted cigars. I was very much a cigar smoker at the time, and aware of his reputation, I said yes eagerly. He disappeared, returned with a box, and passed it. I have never had a better Havana. About three o'clock the other guests said they had to leave and offered to drive us back to town. Mr. Knopf escorted us to the car and waved us off.

When I had mentioned my invitation to others in the office, they told me that this was protocol. A new editor, and wife or husband if there was one, always had a Sunday lunch at Purchase a month or two after starting. I was not told the aftermath. The next day, Monday, I got the secretary's call again and went in, still warm from the Sunday. The moment I set foot in his office, Mr. Knopf started barking. I forget what it was about, but it was certainly a trifle. What struck me hardest was that it all seemed planned. He had carefully saved this matter that bothered him so that he could storm about it the day after my visit to his



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home. He didn't want me to get any wrong ideas about my status.

Again I repressed a smile. When I was a boy, if my father praised me for some achievement or other, which he often did, he always also warned me not to get a swelled head.

## IV

I wasn't doing well at Knopf. Most of my earlier editorial experience had been in working on manuscripts with authors, sometimes without them. I had done relatively little acquisition. Others had acquired, I had judged and edited. Here at Knopf I had moved into an almost new profession, and I felt somewhat inadequate. Around me were editors who had strings of authors they had known for years, editors who foamed with new projects of wide variety. I tried to think up projects, but little came that was of use. I worked with the author of the good novel that had been assigned to me. I worked on other manuscripts that came under old contracts, if the original editor had departed or was busy. Through the months I signed a few books of mild promise. But only one new project of my own, really my own, stirred me greatly.

I had begun at Knopf in early June of 1959. After my first weeks of lunching with agents, they sent me some dog-eared manuscripts. Then I went to call on an agent, no lunch, a quiet woman named Elizabeth Otis. We chatted in her little office, which was like a corner of a living room, and a week or so later she sent me the manuscript of a novel called *Confessions of a Moviegoer* by Walker Percy. Perhaps she chose to send it to me because I was, had been for a year, the film critic of *The New Republic*.

From the first page I knew that I had found a real writer. From the first page I felt an added excitement, the chance to establish myself at Knopf. But my heart began to hurt as I continued. Percy never stopped being a real writer, but he had not written a satisfactory novel. I couldn't recommend it for publication. The worst of it was that some other publisher might take the novel as it was, risking loss, just to get the author. I thought that this would be a poor move for Knopf. I had to send the manuscript back. I wrote a three-page letter to Miss Otis, telling her how dismal I felt and explaining what I thought was needed. I added that if Percy ever felt like doing more work on the book, I would be eager to see it again.

I viewed the matter as finished. I expected that she and Percy would discount my suggestions, that I would have to add the experience to my debit account at Knopf. But in mid-July Miss Otis telephoned to say that Percy was going to work on the book. It was a happy surprise. The revised novel arrived three months later, much improved, but, I thought, not yet ready for publication. I also thought that, after Percy's evidence of good faith, it was time for the firm to reciprocate. We ought to take an option on the book if we were going to ask him to do more work.

By this time I had learned that Percy was the nephew of William Alexander Percy, the author of *Lanterns on the Levee*, a memorable book about the South that Knopf had published in 1941. I had also learned a few things about Walker Percy himself. Thus armed, I phoned Mr. Knopf's secretary for an appointment and was soon asked to come in.

I told him about the author, who lived near New Orleans, about the novel, which was set down there, about the revision. Mr. Knopf looked out the window, seeming to endure my chatter. I mentioned the author's uncle, and he grunted. I said that though the novel needed further work, I thought it was time to show our bona fides by taking an option.

He turned to me sharply. He began to grow florid. His nostrils flared. "What d'you mean, option? How much?"

"I thought two hundred dollars now, against a total advance of a thousand if we finally accept it."

His eyes seemed to become bloodshot. He shook his head slightly. I recognized this movement. He saw another editorial attempt to ruin him.

"I think it's in order," I said. "After what he's done already. It's a gesture, of course, a token. Nothing to do with subsidizing him. In fact, I've heard that he's a man of independent means."

"Oh," said Mr. Knopf, his flush subsiding. "In that case, give him two-fifty."

Yet again I didn't laugh. Again I felt this odd ease with him, as if he had just shown a family idiosyncrasy.



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When the second revision of Percy's novel arrived in January of 1960, I felt it needed still more work. I asked two other editors to read it and make suggestions. They agreed with me about the quality of the book, its promise, its need for further work. Percy felt dashed, naturally, but he decided to do more on the book along the lines suggested. In August of 1960 he sent in the third revision. I voted to accept it, and others agreed with me.

The progress of this manuscript, though it then mattered little to the firm generally, was a bridge that helped me across a skimpy time. I had some luck with other books, but I knew it was not my forte to hunt up books or to commission them. Every day I felt less competent at it. It affected me. Laura began to hope that I would quit or be fired. I wanted to succeed at the same time that I wanted to get out.

Still, matters had gone well enough for me to make a scouting trip. I knew authors in Santa Fe and Hollywood and Santa Barbara. I had published two of them at a house where I worked previously. I suggested the trip for the late fall of 1959, and somewhat to my surprise it was approved. The firm was feeling momentarily warm toward me because a famous author of theirs, who had been tempted to go to another house, had been persuaded by me to stay. Luckily his agent and I had been friends for years. Luckily, too, a few years back I had met the author's former fiancée in his native country and could talk to him about her, which beguiled him.

On the trip I acquired two novels, one of which was published by Knopf. The other wound up on another list. Since Santa Barbara was on my schedule, Mr. Knopf asked me to visit one of the firm's authors, Ross Macdonald, who lived there under his real name, Ken Millar. He was a friendly man, and we had a congenial hour together. When I returned, I was asked to superintend the publication of his new novel. No editing was necessary. I shepherded it through the production steps and the sales conference. Shortly before the book was published, I read that a Hollywood producer had bought the film rights. I sent Millar a telegram of congratulations, and I forwarded a copy of the telegram to Mr. Knopf.

When I came back from lunch, a lavender memo was on my desk. That color was exclusive to Mr. Knopf. He told me that he thought my telegram was superfluous, and if it wasn't, then he was the one to send it. To me, more family stuff.

## V

In May of 1960 I had my first strong hint that my Knopf days were numbered. The treasurer of the firm called me in and showed me the total of my lunch tabs since the previous June. He asked bluntly what the firm had got in return. My reply was sound enough. A year is a short time in which to ask an editor in book publishing for cash results. But I knew that I didn't have much coming to change matters. Just about then, I didn't strengthen my position by asking for an extra week's vacation unpaid. I was to have two weeks, but I had lately sold a long story to a magazine, written in the mornings before I went to the office, and I had some extra money. Laura and I wanted to go to Europe, and two weeks seemed too short. The extra week was granted. Some months afterward, I thought it had been granted because I was marked for exit.

The tone of my relations with Mr. Knopf warmed or cooled from day to day, according to the incidents of the day. With Mrs. Knopf, the tone was always the same. She was friendly, partly because I had little to do with her, other than an occasional manuscript that she asked me to read, partly because she was harsh only with the women in the office. Mr. Knopf was slightly embarrassed with women. I never heard him say a sharp word to a woman. But there were many more men than women on the premises so he was not short of chances to grow flushed.

Even though my dealings with Mrs. Knopf were placid, I was surprised, just before Laura and I were to go abroad, when she invited us to dinner. Since it was a midweek evening, the dinner was at her New York apartment near the office. The occasion was quite different from the luncheon at Mr. Knopf's the previous fall, except that once again one of the pair explained why the other was not present. I knew that he almost never went to her midweek entertainings. At the end of the day, if he wasn't going to a musical performance,



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he generally headed straight for Purchase.

Her apartment was decorated to suggest European chic. The three other guests were European, the food was fancy. To the man on her right, Mrs. Knopf spoke French quite often, with an American accent. She carried her small black poodle to the table, gathered up against her thin bosom in her thin hand. As she sat, she placed it on the floor at her feet with a "*petit chou.*"

I had read of her glittering luncheons and soirees through the years. She was a graceful hostess. Still, given the passage of time and the changes in her, there was something almost spectral about the evening, as if she were striving against difficulties to maintain her former self. When we were back in the living room for coffee, she put her black handbag on the floor next to her chair and evidently forgot about it. A few minutes later, she glanced down and, with the bad eyesight that she would not admit, she thought the handbag was her poodle. "*Mon petit chou,*" she said tenderly and picked up the handbag. I shrivelled with embarrassment, but she merely laughed at her mistake, put the bag down, and continued conversing. I admired her, even her persistence in pretending that the past was the present.

The evening was so pleasant that I forgot to wonder why we had been invited. It slipped into place as merely one social evening in a line of such evenings, although in this case the invitation could not be returned. I meant to thank Mrs. Knopf again the next day at the weekly editorial meeting, but she didn't attend.

Mr. Knopf began the meeting with his usual personal trivia, this time a letter from an old crony, an official of the National Park Service. The parks were a pet subject of his. Then he moved on to current business, and again, except for literary taste, I saw how well he handled problems, either with solutions or by dismissing subjects as not worth pursuing. Then, going through his folder, he came to a letter from an academic friend of his, an important professor somewhere. The professor asked for word on a manuscript he had sent in three weeks before. Mr. Knopf turned to an editor, a plump little gray-haired man in his sixties. "I passed his manuscript to you," said Mr. Knopf. "Well? What's the word?"

"Alfred," said the editor, turning both palms upward, "I'm terribly sorry. I've been terribly busy with two other books. I have not read it yet. Terribly sorry."

Mr. Knopf boiled red. His nostrils flared. "That man is not only a close friend, he's a distinguished scholar. Three weeks!" He ground out the next words between his teeth. "I ought to cut off your head and send it to him."

The editor blushed. His fingers wiggled. He tried to shrug a little dignity around himself.

That night I told Laura about the meeting. She was upset. She asked me if Mr. Knopf had ever spoken like that to me. Truthfully, I said that he had not. He bullied only those who were afraid of him. But he didn't know why I wasn't afraid of him.

## VI

In late August I returned to the office from vacation. I felt that nothing had changed, that I was putting on my costume again for more performances of a play whose run was uncertain. My adventures with new manuscripts continued as sorrily as before. I found little that was of interest, and if I did, the firm usually frowned on it. The big exception was Walker Percy's novel, now finally revised. The title, with his approval, was shortened to *The Moviegoer.* The book went into production.

One morning in the middle of September Mr. Knopf opened the door of my office. "Are you free for lunch?" he asked abruptly. I was. "I'd like to invite you to lunch in my office today," he said. "Just a sandwich." That would be fine, I said. "All right," as he waved his hand. "Twelve-thirty." He left.

I didn't understand the invitation. Matters were much as they had always been between us. Mrs. Knopf's dinner invitation, surprise though it had been, seemed to have come out of general amiability between us. With Mr. Knopf, the weather was not steady. I had to wonder what this luncheon was for, what would happen.

Nothing happened. Eventually I saw that this was the point of the luncheon. At the time I expected a point of business, but there was none. We just had lunch together. His office was furnished as much like a living room as



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space would permit. It was well carpeted, and against the walls stood bookcases, some with glass doors. Across from the large desk were a sofa and a couple of easy chairs, grouped around a coffee table. On the table was our lunch. For himself, he had only cottage cheese. He explained that he and Mrs. Knopf were off soon to France, to visit the Bordeaux vineyards at harvest time. There would be food as well as wine, and his doctor had ordered him to diet beforehand. For me there was an excellent roast beef sandwich from Reuben's, who had been sending him sandwiches for many years on slices of large round loaves of rye. There was a bottle of German beer. There was a piece of Reuben's famous cheesecake.

We chatted. We chatted like two men who were lunching together because they both worked for the same firm. Only two matters stand out. After a while we began to talk about an author because a book of his was on the shelf next to Mr. Knopf. I had published the man's first novel elsewhere and had declined his second. Mr. Knopf and I disagreed about his abilities. He flushed, checked himself, shook his head. "Sooner or later," he said, "you and I always disagree." I thought of my father. It wasn't as frequently true with him, still that comment was a reminder. The talk went on, and in the course of it, I said, "Mr. Knopf," as I had been doing for over a year. Again he flushed slightly, said, "Oh, for—" and checked himself again. Clearly he had intended to say, "Oh, for heaven's sake, why can't you call me 'Alfred' like everyone else?" But he didn't say it. The luncheon finished. I thanked him. He shook hands and said gravely, "You're very welcome."

While he and Mrs. Knopf were in France, I was one day called into a vice-president's office. I was told that a decision had been reached. Knopf and I were to go our own ways. I was to leave at the end of September, about a week away. My only feeling was that a misty picture had come into focus.

I knew then the reason for that luncheon in Mr. Knopf's office. I wasn't sure that Mrs. Knopf's dinner party was connected, but I was sure about the luncheon. It had been his way of saying good-bye without the fuss of firing me himself. He certainly must have expected that this would be apparent to me after the firing. His action, I thought, was quite unlike anything my father would have done. This seemed oddly appropriate at the finish.

On the day I left Knopf, I had a telephone call from the editor-in-chief of another house. I went to see him, and he offered me a job at a slightly better salary. I told him I had just been fired. He waved his hand and said, "By Knopf. Some of the best editors in New York. . . ."

Laura and I talked over the new offer that night. She said I ought to take my break with Knopf as a blessing, a liberation. Other fields were opening up for me. "You didn't get the hives when they fired you," she said. She urged me not to accept the new offer. I turned it down. I turned down the six or seven offers I got during the next six or seven years. The other fields were growing for me. I had been an editor for almost eleven years and had often loved it. But as I had been discovering my weakness in that work, I was discovering some strengths elsewhere. I was finished with publishing. I felt an oddity. Thanks to Mr. Knopf himself, though he didn't know it, I felt, in my mid-forties, as if I were leaving my family to set out on my own.

*The Moviegoer* was published in May of 1961, was favorably but inadequately reviewed, and sank. Anyone who has worked in publishing knows of excellent books that sank. I thought that Percy's novel had become another such ghost, and thought so for almost a year. The chance intervention of one man, a man I never met, altered the novel's fate.

A. J. Liebling, then the press critic of *The New Yorker*, had read one of the reviews. He was interested because of the New Orleans setting. Liebling knew much about Louisiana, had written a book about it. He bought a copy of *The Moviegoer* and was greatly taken by it. By this time, toward the end of the year, the judges for the National Book Awards were at work reading for the 1962 prizes. Liebling's wife, Jean Stafford, was one of the three judges that year in the fiction category. Liebling gave Stafford his copy of the book and urged her to read it. She had not heard of it. The Knopf people had not included it in the batch of eligible novels that they had sent to the judges as candidates for the fiction award.



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Stafford soon urged her fellow judges to read the book. The three of them unanimously voted the fiction award to *The Moviegoer*. The book, lifted from oblivion, joined the body of American literature. Percy was encouraged for his future work.

But not by Mr. Knopf. A friend of mine in the firm was present when the news of the award was brought to Mr. Knopf. I was told that he snarled and said, "They're running that prize into the ground." I was also told that, when Percy came up to New York to accept the award, Mr. Knopf treated him with reserve. Percy's subsequent books were published elsewhere.

Still, a day after the award ceremony, Mr. Knopf sent me a note on his luxurious private stationery. It was only one sentence: "I want to congratulate you, even at this late date, on the early confidence you showed in Walker Percy." The next day I sent a two-sentence reply: "Thanks for your note. It's pleasant, of course, to have one's opinion substantiated." I began the reply: "Dear Alfred."



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*REAPPRAISAL*

# Portrait of Justus Lipsius

ANTHONY GRAFTON

Justus Lipsius survives, barely, as a fading figure on the periphery of our mental panorama of Renaissance culture. We are amused at his famous offer to recite the text of Tacitus while his listener held a dagger to his belly—and to allow the listener to plunge the dagger in if Lipsius stumbled on a word. We are amazed by his early career as a prodigy, one that made him the proverbial perfect schoolboy as late as the nineteenth century, when King, the classical master in Kipling's *Stalky & Co.*, still plagued his boys with anecdotes about "the learned Lipsius, who at the age of. . . ." We have admired the public image that he wished to leave behind him, as projected in his friend Rubens's *Four Philosophers:* a quiet, contemplative gentleman, one who is happiest when reading books or cultivating his legendary tulip garden while his dog Mops barked at his heels. We have even heard his voice. Lipsius, as Morris Croll showed many years ago, did more than anyone else to popularize the Senecan, pointed prose style that so delighted the strong wits of seventeenth-century Europe. When we read the epigrams of Quevedo or the essays of Bacon, we can detect many echoes of that pointed Latin prose, poor in verbs but rich in inkhorn terms, that enchanted students in Leiden and Louvain, inspired the great scholar-printer Henri Estienne to write a whole book *About Lipsius's Latinity*—and provoked Lipsius's Leiden successor Joseph Scaliger to cry, "Je ne sçay quel Latin c'est."

Yet recent scholarship has revealed another Lipsius as well, a figure both more flamboyant and more alienated than the stately icon that Rubens created and many later historians have helped to gild. Lipsius was no retiring academic who wrote for his colleagues in the "community of the competent." In fact, he was a best-seller. He took an active and often unattractive part in the great debates of his day about civil war and religious liberty. More dramatic still, he was a plagiarist, a liar, and a heretic. He changed churches in pursuit of sanctity—or safety—almost as easily as he changed jobs in the course of his dazzling academic career. His contemporaries knew him not as *Lipsius philosophus*, the Stoic unmoved by pain or fear, but as *Lipsius Proteus*, one of the most puzzling and unnerving intellectual celebrities of a time that included such rivals as Giordano Bruno and Tommaso Campanella. And we must come to terms with this second Lipsius, as well as with the first—and, finally, with the full range of paradoxes and enigmas that we are posed by the existence in one man of these two personae—before we can leave Lipsius in his garden and conclude with some reflections on the larger meaning of his case.

First, Rubens's Lipsius, the sage and scholar. There is no doubt that Lipsius ranked with the most learned and creative members of his generation—itself, perhaps, the most learned generation in European history, that of Joseph Scaliger and Isaac Casaubon. His first book, a miscellany of short essays on technical points of textual criticism, written in phosphorescent Ciceronian Latin, he finished in 1566, when he was all of nineteen years old. His edition of Tacitus, which marked a radical improvement in a notoriously difficult text, appeared in 1574, when he was not yet thirty. And throughout his life (which extended from 1547 to 1606), he issued a powerful stream of editions, commentaries, and monographs. These culminated in 1605 in a second magnificent

ANTHONY GRAFTON is professor of history at Princeton University and the author of *Joseph Scaliger: A Study in the History of Classical Scholarship*, Volume 1: *Textual Criticism and Exegesis.*



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edition, that of Seneca, and won him preferment in the academic centers of Lutheran Europe (Jena), Calvinist Europe (Leiden), and Catholic Europe (Louvain).

How can we judge Lipsius's achievement in the technical and rebarbative fields he liked to cultivate? We can turn for some enlightenment to modern classical scholars who have replowed his furrows. Elaine Fantham, for example, has recently confirmed the excellence of Lipsius's critical judgment as applied to Seneca. Presented with a late and not completely accurate manuscript descended from the famous *codex Etruscus* of the *Tragedies*, Lipsius realized that he was dealing not just with scribal errors but with a previously unused branch of the textual tradition. Accordingly he made so many valid changes in the text then standard that the discoverer of *Etruscus* itself, Gronovius, had little to do save confirm from the original source the justness of Lipsius's choices and emendations. J. Ruysschaert and C. O. Brink have subjected Lipsius's corrections of the text of Tacitus's *Annales* to even more searching scrutiny. The results are striking. In *Annales* I, modern texts contain some 130 emendations of the text transmitted by the *codex Mediceus*. Eighty of these, many obvious, were made by the first editor, the younger Beroaldo, who prepared the manuscript for the press in 1505 with great skill and tact. Lipsius comes next, with twenty to his credit. The competition lags far behind; indeed, the combined efforts of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century scholars have resulted in two emendations generally accepted. Statistics, admittedly, tend to glaze the reader's eye; but these few numbers do suggest just how gigantic an effort Lipsius made to improve the texts he worked on, and how secure his mastery was of the historical background and the historian's language. Most impressive, perhaps, are the fairly numerous passages that Lipsius left unchanged, that later scholars emended, and that modern scholars—catching up with their sixteenth-century predecessor—now take as Tacitean rather than corrupt.

Yet numbers tell an austere and limited story. To grasp a scholar's characteristic working methods, we must catch him in his study (or his garden), applying his favorite tools to his chosen raw materials. And we must compare his work systematically not to that of his modern successors but to that of his predecessors and contemporaries. We can spy on Lipsius as he attacks one of the many attractive complex problems posed by one of his favorite authors: the perennial question of which Seneca wrote what. In the Middle Ages, more or less everything that circulated under the name Seneca was attributed to the philosopher who suffered under Nero. But the fourteenth century saw the awakening of a new historical curiosity and a new stylistic sensitivity. In many cases, Renaissance humanism appeared and all was light; it took only one scholar of the new brand to read the younger Pliny's letters and notice that this Pliny could not very well be the author of the *Natural History*, since he vividly described that other Pliny's death. But in Seneca's case the humanist confronted a pullulating mass of disparate materials: letters, essays, tragedies, rhetorical exercises, works on natural philosophy, and a correspondence with Saint Paul. He also knew, from ancient testimony, that two writers named Seneca had flourished under the early Roman Empire. And he saw that no single man could have written this entire discordant corpus. No wonder, given this range of evidence and problems, that the new Senecan scholarship served to transmute the simple assumptions of the medieval scribe into an unbearable cacophony of contradictory hypotheses.

We can begin by following a learned man of the early fifteenth century, Sicco Polenton, as he worked at these problems in his pioneering history of Latin literature. Sicco knew from the play *Octavia*, so he thought, that the author of Seneca's tragedies had outlived Nero and described his death. But he also knew that Seneca the moral philosopher had died before Nero. He knew that Seneca the creator of rhetorical exercises had had three sons, one of whom was also named Seneca. And he tied all of this information together with a neat philologist's clove hitch. One Seneca had written the rhetorical and philosophical works and died a Christian; his son Seneca had written the tragedies. Naturally, this solution not only solved problems but raised them. But Sicco was equal to the challenge. When (unnamed) detractors suggested that the *Octavia*, the keystone of his argumentative arch, was not by the author of the other



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plays, he buried them under a flood of smug rebuttal of a kind unhappily still to be found in philological argument:

> Any expert can see that these tragedies reveal no variety, but that all of them have one and the same tenor of style, eloquence, dignity; thus all of them, as they are, seem the product of one source, one parent, one mind.

No one with insight, he concluded, could deny the plays' unity of authorship. This argument, which makes the one play all modern scholars have thought spurious the companion and even the touchstone of the rest, seems strange enough. But it is not half so curious as Sicco's other daring hypothesis. In the rhetorical work, Seneca mentions that he could have heard Cicero speak had the civil wars not made it impracticable. Accordingly, he must have been fairly mature—Sicco suggests fourteen years old at least—before Cicero died in 43 B.C. Yet Seneca the philosopher died in A.D. 65, and some humanists denied that he could have heard Cicero at all. Sicco, however, cut this knot as elegantly as he had tied the other. His opponents, he asserted, simply failed to see the obvious truth—Seneca must have lived to be 118 years old. Anyone who failed to accept this view "would rather quarrel than accept the obvious truth."

Erasmus, a hundred years later, saw far more sharply than Sicco had that not everything that glittered with Seneca's name was Senecan gold. For the correspondence of Seneca with Saint Paul he had only contempt, and he disproved its authenticity with an elegant piece of historical reasoning:

> There is nothing in the letters from Paul worthy of Paul's spirit. One hardly hears the name of Christ, which normally pervades Paul's discourse. [The author] makes that powerful defender of the Gospel cowardly and timorous. . . . And it's the mark of really monumental stupidity when he makes Seneca send Paul a book *De copia verborum* [On building vocabulary] so that he will be able to write better Latin. If Paul didn't know Latin he could have written in Greek. Seneca did know Greek.

But Erasmus made little effort to separate the rest of the Senecan corpus into its original components. He did doubt that one man could have written all of the tragedies. But of Cicero's contemporary, Seneca the rhetorician who died under Nero, Erasmus said only that he wished that his *Declamationes* had survived in their entirety, "for they would have been a great help in [learning rhetorical] invention and judgement."

With these efforts of earlier humanists we may now compare what Lipsius had to say in the set-piece chapter, sharp and concise, with which his *Electa* of 1580 begins:

> The *vulgus* holds that books entitled *Controversiae* and *Suasoriae* were written by the Seneca known as the philosopher, who was Nero's tutor. The *vulgus* holds this, and therefore it errs. That opinion is refuted by Seneca's period, his life, his style. I explain the problem of period in detail. Whoever wrote these books lived in the time of Augustus and Tiberius, not that of Claudius and Nero. I infer this from a number of passages where he speaks about himself. He says at one point that he knew Cestius Pius, Portius Latro, Valerius Messalla [minor rhetoricians who lived under Augustus]; at another that he heard the poet Ovid declaim; and that he knew Asinius Pollio [d. A.D. 5] both as a robust man and as an old one. I know that all these lights illuminated the middle of the principate of Augustus. But Seneca [the philosopher] flourished in the time of Claudius and Nero.

Lipsius easily disposes of his predecessor's effort to make Seneca the classical prototype of the two-thousand-year-old man. After all, he points out, Tacitus treats Seneca's last years and death in detail, and describes him as a fairly vigorous old man. He could hardly have applied such terms to a slippered pantaloon of 118. After dispelling this and other errors, the result of which had been to confuse the two Senecas as thoroughly as the two Menaechmi in Plautus's play, Lipsius sets out his own lucid hypothesis. Two writers named Seneca must be distinguished. The elder lived in the days of Augustus and wrote the rhetorical works; the younger, his son, lived under Claudius and Nero and wrote philosophy and tragedy.

Clearly Lipsius's philology was dramatically different from that of Sicco or Erasmus. What strikes the reader most sharply is not that Lipsius's solution is basically the modern one, but that his methods are so professional. He does not examine isolated passages or data as though a few bits of evidence could decide the case. Rather, he pulls from the rhetorical works every passage that mentions a contemporary, lines them up, and then draws from them a plausible and coherent theory. He



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does not refute his adversaries by claiming a superior sensibility, as though the ability to date a text were something as ineffable as a sense of smell. Rather, he gives all the relevant evidence and shows that no hypothesis but his can be reconciled with it. Above all, he establishes his point simply because he knows the history of Rome, civil and literary, year by year and almost day by day, and can thus make what had been mere names to his predecessors into unbreakable links in the chain of his arguments. This combination of learning and precision marks Lipsius off as a member of that great generation that set the history of the ancient world itself, as well as that of ancient literature, into its proper order.

Lipsius's virtuosity as a scholar enabled him not only to restore texts but also to reconstruct lost customs and institutions. His works on such topics have more virtues than a sample can reveal. He had the imaginative ability to see in disparate and difficult texts the traces of what he liked to describe as an ancient custom "fleeing into oblivion." He had a detective writer's gift for charging obscure subjects with excitement, so that the reader too becomes eager to know how long you had to serve in the Roman army before you could become a *veteranus*, or who the *iuvenes* were who made trouble at games and chariot races. And he had a dedicated scholar's willingness to work through any text, however unattractive; to nail down every detail, however obscure; and to use every possible device—including elaborate illustrations—to clarify his descriptions. His profusely illustrated and elaborately documented books marked a new stage in the development of historical research.

In one respect, to be sure, Lipsius tried to spoil the gleaming perfection of his own achievements. He stole emendations of the texts he worked on from any book and any person that could provide them. He gave little or no acknowledgment of his debts. And when these surfaced—as when his former friend Claude Chifflet protested that his own proposals to emend passages in Tacitus's *Annales* were presented as Lipsius's in the latter's commentary—he held his peace, ignored the fuss, and carefully effaced from his working copy of Tacitus—which still survives in Leiden—the references to Chifflet's name that he had neatly entered by Chifflet's proposals in his notes. Yet plagiarism of this kind, though ugly, was not unusual. Both Scaliger and Casaubon played down the merits of their predecessors and claimed others' achievements as their own. As Brink points out, in an age when few scholars fully identified the sources of the texts they printed, it was only natural for conjectures, too, to be passed on from hand to hand without full identification. Given the peculiar nature of conjectural emendations—which, like some sorts of scientific discovery, become private property only when they are published for the first time—it is not hard to see why even a brilliant and learned man might steal a few extra jewels to add to the vast piles that he had excavated, cut, and polished on his own.

Yet—and yet—this story is not the whole one. Lipsius's attitude toward the technical skills he deployed in editions and monographs is unexpectedly complex and ambivalent. On the one hand, he repeatedly mocked the scholars of his time for their perverse obsession with the details of scholarly problems. In an influential little dialogue dedicated to Scaliger, for example, Lipsius portrays himself attending, in a dream, a meeting of the senate of Roman writers. One after another, Cicero, Sallust, and Ovid, Tribonian and Pliny denounce the critics who have mutilated their texts and call for extreme punishments: "Have we no Cornelian law to deal with assassins? And are these men not assassins? How often have they been caught, pen and sword in hand, as they set out to kill a word?" Lipsius trembles in terror, and escapes punishment only when Varro, the greatest Roman scholar, persuades his colleagues that they owe some debt to modern printers and critics. And though the whole exercise ends with a set of rules—not very penetrating ones—for proper textual criticism, it leaves the reader with the impression that critics are intrinsically absurd creatures, who inflict wounds on the very texts they seek to heal. No wonder that Lipsius's *Dream* became the model for a whole subspecies of Latin satires of scholars and scholarship.

Yet Lipsius went further still. In his scholarly works, as well, he repeatedly expressed reservations about the ultimate value of philology. His first edition of the commentary on Tacitus, the greatest of his scholarly feats, carries a stern warning against excessive indulgence in conjectural emendation: "I have



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confirmed some old emendations and added new ones, but have not done either with great zeal. For this is the sin that besets us Critics, and Tacitus nowadays suffers as much from remedies as he once did from errors." Elsewhere he put the point more cogently: *non ad ista sed per ista*, textual criticism is a means not an end. And he added an extensive treatment of this theme to the unannotated edition of Caesar's *Commentaries* that he prepared for use by gentlemen in schools—and that remained standard long after his death.

Lipsius's ambivalence, moreover, is the direct result of a characteristic of his work that is as important as its solid basis of learning. Lipsius saw the real end of scholarship not as scientific but as practical. He chose the texts he edited and the issues he studied with his attention fixed above all on the needs of his own time. He concentrated on Tacitus and Seneca not simply because he esteemed their prose but because he felt that they had lived in, analyzed, and could help the careful modern scholar to put up with an age of despotism and rebellion. In Tacitus, he told his readers, they would find not useless stories about the austere early days of the Roman republic but cold and practical analysis of a world in which power was concentrated in the hands of a small group:

> Tacitus doesn't present you with showy wars or triumphs, which serve no purpose except the reader's pleasure; with rebellions or speeches of the tribunes, with agrarian or frumentary laws, which are quite irrelevant to our time. Behold instead kings and rulers and, so to speak, a theater of our modern life. I see a ruler rising up against the laws in one passage, subjects rising up against a ruler elsewhere. I find the devices that make the destruction of liberty possible and the unsuccessful effort to regain it. I read of tyrants overthrown in their turn, and of power, ever unfaithful to those who abuse it. And there are also the evils that accompany liberty regained: chaos, rivalry between equals, greed, looting, wealth pursued from, not on behalf of, the community. Good God, he is a great and useful writer! And those who govern should certainly have him at hand at all times.

If Tacitus cast the most searching light on the chiaroscuro political scene of the late sixteenth century, Seneca taught those caught up in such events how to survive them with their dignity intact. In the philosophy of later Stoicism, in fact, Lipsius found a simple guide to life, one that would enable the young aristocrat to purge himself of fear and anger, to master his passions, and then to instill discipline in himself and in his soldiers. This was the message that Lipsius made popular in his brief and vivid dialogues *On Constancy*, in which, as he said, he taught subjects their duty: that of suffering what their lords inflicted on them. This was the message, on a grander scale, of the Senecan commentary and the two great manuals of Stoic philosophy that occupied Lipsius during the last decade of his life, and that remained standard works until the nineteenth century.

Antiquarianism, finally, proved to be the most practical of all Lipsius's studies—a conclusion that may seem surprising, given the pejorative sense in which we nowadays use the term in English. In the detailed study of Roman institutions, Lipsius found solutions to the most pressing problems of military and political organization. For example, in the detailed accounts of Roman military organization and tactics given by Polybius and others, Lipsius thought that he could find the model for a military machine more effective than anything in existence. He reconstructed and recommended Roman soldiers' customs: their Spartan habit of living on bread and water in the field, their acceptance of a stern code of discipline enforced by condign punishment, their willingness to dig ditches and build palisades. He praised their weapons, their formations, their uniforms, and their chains of command. And though he admitted that some modern weapons, like the pike, had their place in the military order, he urged the commanders of his time to combine these with "ancient arms and the ancient order and line of battle"—and promised that if they would do so, their armies would give them a monopoly of violence in their states and enable them to create vast empires.

Lipsius, in other words, created a brand of philology that was entirely relevant to current and practical problems. No wonder, then, that his studies attracted the attention of his rivals—like Joseph Scaliger, who was still making sketches of the Roman *pilum* on his deathbed in order to show where Lipsius had gone wrong. No wonder, either, that his works reached generals as well as scholars. Maurice of Nassau, the most competent commander



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the Dutch had, studied with Lipsius at Leiden and put his lecture notes into practice afterward. In 1595 a friend reported to Lipsius that

> Count Maurice, while encamped at the Hague, has taught his soldiers to fight like Romans. There were 60 footsoldiers with spears on the one side, 40 on the other armed by ancient custom with the Roman shield. The fight took place, and the men with shields stood firm for a long time despite the opposition of those with spears, which had no effect. In the end, the men with shields were driven off thanks to the violence and agility of a few of the others—yet in such a way that they retained much dignity and praise.

It is bemusing to see scholarship so firmly in possession of the role that science enjoys now, the source of the powerful knowledge that statesmen most need. Yet the spectacle helps us to understand why Lipsius's work found a market. It shows that military leaders were predisposed to follow ancient precedents and models. And it shows that Lipsius really could interpret these far more subtly than professional soldiers. In this case Lipsius wrote back to explain that Maurice had chosen the wrong way to imitate the Romans:

> The experiment is a good one, but in my opinion should be carried out differently. One should not set one company, that is, 60 soldiers, against another 60, but several companies at once. It is that conjoining and mutual help which give strength, as beams do in buildings. The Roman legions always beat the phalanx—but together. Had you set a few Roman soldiers against a few Macedonians, things might have gone quite differently.

The cloistered scholar had to teach the general, then, that the shape of Roman shields mattered less than the cohesion of Roman armies as a whole. Lipsius, as G. Oestreich and W. Hahlweg have shown, provided Maurice and other influential military thinkers with the basic ideas from which they created the seventeenth-century Military Revolution, with its disciplined professional armies and elaborate chains of command. No wonder that Maurice seemed "to fall in love" with Lipsius's book on Roman arms, the *De militia Romana*. This great book not only brought lost aspects of antiquity back to life but reshaped the face of battle.

Lipsius did not only study war. In fact, he tried to distill the wisdom of the ancients on all political and military subjects into a single, accessible whole, and did so in a book that reached a public even larger than that of the *De militia Romana*. Lipsius's *Six Books of Politics*, published in 1589, guided the early modern monarch through the whole grim array of tasks and duties that confronted him. It told him how to raise an army, how to quell dissent, how to impose discipline. It told him which tricks against enemies were licit and which (those that involved the breaking of oaths) were not. And it did all of this in a couple of hundred uniquely pithy pages. For in the *Politica*, as Lipsius pointed out in the preface, he brilliantly mixed entirely traditional, even classical, ingredients in such a way that they made an ultra-modern concoction. One sample will give a taste of Lipsius's creation. Should a state, he asks, tolerate religious dissent? To begin with, one must distinguish between public and private dissent. Then one can lay out the opinions of the ancients in a coherent and useful way:

> I say that they sin publicly, who both entertain wrong opinions about God and the traditional rites and induce others to do so by making disturbances. Privately, who entertain the same wrong opinions, but keep them to themselves. As to the first, the question is, should such men get off scot free? No! "Let them be punished by you lest you be punished in their place." (Cyprian)
>
> Especially if they create disturbances. "Better that one perish than that unity perish." (Augustine)
>
> "The penalty for profanation of religions varies from place to place, but there always is one." (Seneca)
>
> There is no room for clemency here. "Burn, cut, so that a member perish rather than the whole body." (Cicero)
>
> "For crimes against holy religion amount to crimes against everyone." (Justinian)

Lipsius, in other words, created not a smooth fresco of his own devising but a brilliant mosaic of classical sentiments, astutely chosen and arranged. In this case, his assemblage of authoritarian *sententiae* draws on pagan and Christian, legal and oratorical texts. Nothing could seem clearer than that all wise men, at all times and places, have called for the suppression of public religious dissent. And Lipsius, drawing heavily on his wonderfully stocked memory, found and assembled quotations of equal brevity and pith on every



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subject from the need of real soldiers to dig their own ditches to the need of real tyrants to be punished.

This recipe for political discourse tickled even more palates than Lipsius's military cookbook. The *Politics* went through a staggering fifty-four editions in Latin and twenty-two more in vernacular translations. Statesmen read the book as eagerly as professors. Even a hard-bitten professional like Bernardino de Mendoza, a cavalryman under Alba in the 1560s and the Spanish ambassador to France in the days of the Holy League, took time off between efforts to assassinate Queen Elizabeth to translate the *Politics* into Spanish. Lipsius's new way of teaching politics induced thousands of foreign students to come to Leiden, which became for a time the largest university in Europe. His grim political maxims became the staple of political thought in much of Europe. They were vulgarized by the writers on state secrets, *arcana rerumpublicarum*. They were cannibalized by commentators on Tacitus and students writing dissertations. They were even satirized by the great opponent of centralized monarchy and religious repression, Traiano Boccalini, in his bitterly comic *Newsletters from Parnassus*.

It is not hard to account for the success of *Politica à la mode de Lipse*. Humanists of the generation before his had also seen philology as the one tool that could deal constructively with civil and religious war. But the great jurists of mid-sixteenth-century France, François Baudouin and Jean Bodin, had envisioned a philology very different from Lipsius's. They held that the young leader must begin by reading all significant historians (Bodin provided a helpful list of several hundred titles to be getting on with). He must next study each historian in the light of his original situation and assumptions. He must then study the events the historian recorded in the light of his nation's experience as a whole—in the light, in fact, of every available fact about the physical setting, climatic conditions, and political institutions that had shaped the individuals and the nation. Bodin knew that peoples migrated, and thus insisted that his future leader not only study the nations as the historians described them, but also pursue them back to their origins, however distant. In order to locate these he made magnificent use of etymology—arguing, for example, that the Belgian term for the Gauls, Walloon, was most informative; in its Latin form, *Ouallones*, it revealed that they were a French tribe that had wandered about saying "Où allons-nous?" Only after every battle and every institution had been set like a jewel into a context fully reconstructed by up-to-date scholarship could one hope to assess its value and write beside it, in one's notebook, CTV (*consilium turpe sed utile*—a vile plan, but a useful one) or CH (*consilium honestum*).

In theory this program realized the highest ideals of humanism. In practice it resulted in utter intellectual chaos. No one could hope to find straight answers to practical questions in Bodin's mistitled masterpiece, the *Method for the Easy Comprehension of History*. Bodin himself abandoned historicism and philology and found in conversion to Judaism and the persecution of witches an intellectual and emotional security that his scholarship had not afforded him. By contrast, Lipsius's *Politica* offered authoritative maxims stripped of context and complication. No wonder that these won the day, and held the high ground until they were replaced around 1650 by the new theories of Hermann Conring and William Petty, with their emphasis on economic and demographic problems. To be sure, Lipsius's synthesis was not his own invention. He owed his basic assumptions, at least, to the teacher he encountered in his early years in Rome, Marc-Antoine Muret. But Muret's Roman superiors never let him develop his views at any length—and at first would not let him lecture on an author so hostile to Jews and Christians and Tacitus. The details and the literary form at any rate were Lipsius's own.

It is just here, in Lipsius's most successful works, that the paradoxes seem most glaring. Lipsius was a professional student of the ancient world. He based his claim to provide modern rulers with powerful knowledge on his supreme ability to interpret ancient texts. And yet, to make his texts useful in the age of Philip II, Lipsius constantly had to interpret them not as his sense of their authors' views suggested but as his own requirements dictated. To re-create the Roman military order as a whole he had to use texts from many different periods as if they described the same institution—a practice that provoked Scaliger to enter many critical marginalia in his copy of



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the *De militia Romana*. To construct a Stoic ethics for the modern warrior, Lipsius had to pretend, far more strongly than the evidence warranted, that the writings of Epictetus and Seneca "secretly lead one to Christian doctrine and to piety"—and to support this view not with the evidence of the texts but with an anecdote about how useful Epictetus had been to the pious Cardinal Cesare Baronio. To construct his politics for the modern governor, finally, Lipsius had to banish all thought of literary or historical context from his mind. He himself compared his enterprise to the making of a poetic cento, and argued that in that genre one was not only free but obliged to twist lines from their original senses. This comparison is eloquent. The poetic cento Lipsius's readers knew best was perhaps the nuptial one by Ausonius, in which innocent lines and half-lines from Virgil are twisted into a splendidly obscene epithalamium complete with a section on the taking of virginity. In comparing his *Politica* to such works, Lipsius made clear that he saw himself less as a scholar collecting data than as a writer continuing—and reshaping—a literary tradition.

By the end of his life Lipsius readily admitted that his chief aim had been not to interpret the ancient world but to exploit it. He described the *Politica* and *Constantia* as the natural culmination of his life's work. And he described that as an effort to make philology useful: "I was the first or the only one in my time to make literature serve true wisdom. I made philology into philosophy." In this comment, as Renaissance readers knew, Lipsius was appropriating one of his favorite ancient texts, the 108th letter of Seneca. This described the reverse of the process Lipsius claimed to have brought about. It complained, that is, that in Seneca's time philosophy had degenerated into philology. Everyone was disputing about details and ignoring the main points. Future scholars were reading Virgil for merely scholarly ends:

> The future grammarian studying Virgil does not read that incomparable phrase, *fugit inreparabile tempus*, in order to reflect that "We must be on our guard; swift time drives us onward, and is driven; . . ." but to observe that whenever Virgil describes the speed of time's passage he uses the verb *fugio*.

Seneca and Lipsius prefer the productive, "philosophical" interpreter who appropriates his text to some moral end to the passive, "grammatical" interpreter who merely wants to know how and what his author meant. We must admire the ancient and the Renaissance writer's prescient insight into the methods readers use to construct meanings from their texts. But we must also be depressed by Lipsius's willingness to abandon the core of the humanistic enterprise, the effort to understand the past on its own terms, in his desire to make ancient experience accessible. Here, as well as in his thoughts on religious dissent, we see a humanist at his most inhumane. Lipsius was willing to crush the individuality of Tacitus or Cicero as ruthlessly as that of an Anabaptist; and it is hard to find his posture in either case an attractive one.

How then do we come to terms with Lipsius? Recent scholarship has provided two powerful and exciting ways of doing so. In the first place, Bernard Rekers and others have shown that Lipsius belonged to the Family of Love—that strange sect of spiritual reformers that stretched like a shadowy wheel across mid-sixteenth-century Europe, its hub in Christopher Plantin's printing shop in Antwerp and its spokes reaching London, Prague, and even Madrid (where a small group of disciples in the Escorial itself eagerly awaited each new batch of commentaries on the Apocalypse in code). The members of this group saw all formal religions as equally valuable for instilling discipline in ordinary folk and as equally irrelevant to themselves. Thanks to their prophets and their inward voices, they enjoyed a direct access to religious truth. They were independent of the organized churches, which they joined only out of prudence, and of the Scriptures, which they allegorized very freely. And they considered themselves free to conform to the ruling faith of any land they might settle in. At the same time, though, they laid great stress on the need for peace and order, and urged political authorities to enforce religious unity on the many-headed mob. Knowing that Lipsius belonged to this group, we can understand his willingness to play the Lutheran in Jena, the Catholic in Italy, the Calvinist fellow traveler in Leiden, and the Catholic once again in Louvain. Such changes in external practice and allegiance affected only the out-



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ward and visible husk of what was to Lipsius an inward and spiritual experience.

In the second place, Dutch and German scholars like W. Kühlmann and H. Wansink have found the key to Lipsius in his profession. He was a rhetorician by trade. He used the rhetorician's normal methods to determine the topics of political discourse, to find its verbal and argumentative content, and to adorn it. And he made his *Politica* as much a treasury of sentences to be quoted by other rhetoricians—rather like Erasmus's *Adages*—as a work of analysis. Rhetoricians, of course, seek to persuade their listeners rather than to provide absolutely valid proofs. They can do without convictions. And Lipsius, accordingly, could happily aim all his life not at knowledge of the true and the good but at his own immediate advantage. This body of literature represents Lipsius as a man with little individuality but great will to succeed—a young upwardly mobile philologist, one might say, who sold his matchless skills to a succession of higher bidders.

These two theories, unfortunately, are hard to reconcile with one another, and neither can account for all the facts. If Lipsius was above all a spiritual reformer, he did not have to become an enthusiastic Lutheran pamphleteer at Jena (where he praised the Dukes of Saxony as the race chosen by God to chastise the papacy) or an enthusiastic Catholic pamphleteer in his last years at Louvain (where he applied his philological skills to proving that Flemish shrines of the Virgin had produced miraculous cures for blindness, running sores, and diabolic possession, to the distress of his Catholic as well as his Protestant friends). If he was a pure pragmatist, on the other hand, he did not need to write a provocative argument for centralized monarchy and religious repression while teaching in decentralized and tolerant Holland.

Moreover, neither of these theories helps us to understand Lipsius the interpreter of texts; yet interpretation was the center of his intellectual life. In this area, what strikes the modern student most forcibly are the paradoxes we have already identified. Admittedly, humanists had always had to separate philology from pedagogy. Erasmus the scholar knew a great deal about Greek and Roman homosexuality. But Erasmus the teacher, as Jacques Chomarat has recently reminded us, gave instructions on how to teach the first line of Virgil's second *Eclogue* ("Corydon the shepherd was hot for pretty Alexis") in such a way as to distract the student from realizing what the poem was about. And Erasmus the translator, as Erika Rummel has shown, carefully fudged references to pederasty and homosexuality when rendering decently obscure Greek into worrisomely accessible Latin.

But by the end of the sixteenth century, the paganness of the pagans, their historical and cultural distance from modern Europeans, had become impossible to ignore. Montaigne had proclaimed the bankruptcy of any branch of thought that assumed—as humanism must assume—clear resemblances between ancient examples and modern imitations. And Lipsius can perhaps best be seen as the last serious scholar who tried to rebut these objections and to prove that the ancients still could offer detailed models and instructions for modern actions. The price he paid for splitting scholarship from practice, for insisting that the student keep separate notebooks for political and historical learning, was a high one. He had to transform humanism itself from a device for criticizing the world as it is by comparing it to an ideal past into a device for leaving the world unchanged while learning from the past how to cope with its defects. Where earlier humanists like Erasmus and More had criticized the militarism and greed of the fledgling New Monarchies, Lipsius joyfully collaborated in the creation of the far more powerful and less humane states of the seventeenth century. Yet no other solution could have preserved the apparent utility of classical studies for so long against the corrosive attacks of skepticism and the New Philosophy. And no gentler doctrine could have met the needs of that cruel age, when even Hugo Grotius would defend as legal the destruction of civilian property and the execution of hostages.

In the end, though, explanations like this operate on too general a level to satisfy. Lipsius's achievements can be described and his historical situation can be analyzed. But his personal motives and emotions remain obscure. And perhaps we should be willing to leave them so. It somehow seems appropriate that the man who unveiled the secrets of generals and emperors should preserve his own more modest—but more complex—philologist's secrets intact.



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# *The Steeple*

JOHN DICKSON

I drive down winding roads with Amy
and stop at my discarded church,
its bell cracked and its clapper gone.
We creak through the door to the vaulted room,
the pulpit there, but no seats.
Only a litter of hymnals and beer cans
and little heaps of unanswered prayers.
Only gullies worn on the floor
by families and families of knees.

We open the door to the dark stairs,
feel each step of the endless climb
to the tower of the quiet bell
and look out across the willow tops,
climb to the wind-whish up in the steeple loft
and look out across the sun-washed fields.

Around us initials and dates of love
are carved on the loft ledge—
hearts and arrows and "Ruth" and "Sam."
Below us the weathered gravestones
sleep in their churchyard.
Birds fly between the cherry trees like thoughts
and off in their field the cows
are all facing Mecca.

I think, Amy . . . Amy . . . now is the time,
now before we're as old as the church



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as old as these rafters, old as the bell,
before we spin off to the starry path
or lose ourselves in the night sounds.

But there are no wires between us,
no hand-touch nor eye-talk
and our names don't belong on the rafters.
She says, It's quite a long way to the ground.
I say, This must be a very old church.
Below us the cherry trees are in blossom
and the willows flow along their river
off to the forest on the horizon.
Above us hangs the corroded bell,
no longer able to say what it feels.

We linger up there for a long time
to delay going back down the dark stairs.

JOHN DICKSON conducts the Lighthouse Poetry Series at Northwestern University. He is the author of several books of poems, most recently, *Waving at Trains.*



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# What Ranke Meant

FELIX GILBERT

Modern historical scholarship begins with Leopold von Ranke, and ever since his time historians have appealed to his name and writings to justify their approach to the study of the past. Despite the prestige of his name and work, however, the course that he staked out for the development of historical scholarship is not clear; on the contrary, Ranke's achievement has been given different, almost contradictory interpretations, and he is thought to be the leading advocate and defender of two different, contrasting claims about the purposes of historical scholarship.

One claim is that history is a science, that it is primarily concerned with facts and their causal connection—how they acted upon each other. The historian works with materials contemporary to the time with which he deals, or at least with early reports about the past, preferably documents, whose exactitude and reliability have to be subjected to critical examination. Like any other science, therefore, history has its own method, the critical method, and here Ranke extended the critical method of philology to the entire study of the past. Research in the sources of the past, using the critical method, became the precondition and the center of historical scholarship. In this view, Ranke has been praised as the originator of scientific history.

But Ranke's work has also been interpreted in an entirely different manner. He is said to have integrated in the study of the past the notions of German idealistic philosophy. Here forces work in human existence and social life, whereby ideas attain realization; and the task of the historian is to show the relationship of the struggles of the past to the ideas that stood behind them. Thus the historian has not only to set forth the story of past events but to reach for what is behind them—their meaning. In assigning history this task, Ranke, it has been said, followed Wilhelm von Humboldt, who in his famous treatise on "the task of the historian" had written: "One has scarcely arrived at the skeleton of an event by a crude sorting out of what actually happened. What is so achieved is the necessary basis of history, its raw material, but not history itself. To stop here would be to sacrifice the actual inner truth, well founded within the causal nexus, for an outward, literal and seeming truth."

It is striking that those who regard Ranke as the advocate of scientific history, as well as those who consider him to be the representative of German idealistic philosophy, find justification for their view of Ranke's message in the same statement: the famous, so frequently quoted sentence from the preface of Ranke's first book, *Die Geschichten der Romanischen und Germanischen Völker*, where Ranke writes that he only wants to say "wie es eigentlich gewesen."

I quote this statement in German; its translation into English has its problems, as is shown by the fact that it has been variously translated. The difficulty lies in the ambivalence of the word *eigentlich*. Does Ranke say that he has limited himself to show how it "essentially" was, how it "really" was, how it "actually" was? These are the expressions that have been used to translate the word *eigentlich* into English. *Essentially*, and to a

FELIX GILBERT, professor emeritus in the School of Historical Studies at the Institute for Advanced Study, is author of *To the Farewell Address, Machiavelli and Guicciardini*, and *History: Choice and Commitment*.



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certain extent also *really*, seem to refer to a truth that lies behind the surface of facts; the historian must penetrate behind this surface to the essence of events. On the other hand, translating *eigentlich* as "the actual past" or "actually" suggests that the final aim of the historian is the precise rendering of facts. The term *eigentlich* is of such an opaque character that all of these translations seem possible. Thus the exact meaning of the statement seems uncertain, and this explains why the same statement could serve different, contradictory interpretations.

Can we establish what Ranke really meant? The statement has been quoted innumerable times—with or without naming Ranke as its author—but it is usually quoted out of context. It might be worthwhile, therefore, to see whether the remark remains ambivalent if not self-contradictory when it is set back again into its context.

The famous sentence "wie es eigentlich gewesen" follows the statement that history has been assigned the function of judging the past, of instructing men for the profit of future years; in his preface, Ranke continued, he does not aspire to such lofty undertakings; he only wants to report "wie es eigentlich gewesen." Although Ranke's disavowal of using his historical investigation to teach morals or politics sounds modest, it is not meant to assign to the historian an inferior position. Those who read this passage when Ranke's book appeared in 1824 cannot have believed that these were purely theoretical observations: they must have been aware that the remarks had a polemical character, that they aimed at special targets and implied a rejection of widely held beliefs.

One of the widely held views that Ranke attacked was that history showed the need for strict obedience to moral laws—the central theme of the most popular and most widely read German historian, F. C. Schlosser, whose *World History* was published at the time Ranke was writing his preface. Another notion that Ranke rejected stemmed from Machiavelli's historically based political doctrines, which had become fashionable in Germany at the end of the eighteenth century. In his analysis of Machiavelli's *Discorsi* later in the book, Ranke stated that Machiavelli is not concerned with an explanation and understanding of the past, but only with the establishment of rules valid for the future. In repudiating both of these views, Ranke takes a stand against prevalent notions about the use of history. Ranke implies that, whenever a historian uses the past to present his views about how people ought to behave and act, the picture of the past becomes distorted and false: the historian ought not to go beyond the limits of his task—to show how things were in fact.

There is further proof that this statement ought to be understood in its limited, literal sense, that it was not meant to be a pronouncement about the meaning of history—a proof that, in my opinion, most incomprehensibly has been overlooked. Still in the same preface, three paragraphs further on, Ranke makes a statement about his aims—a statement that certainly does not correspond to the philosophical and programmatic interpretations given to the sentence "wie es eigentlich gewesen." In moving words, it relates Ranke's conviction that it is not up to man to know and to explain the course of world history and that this goal is beyond the reach of man. "One tries, one strives, but in the end it is not attained. Let none be disheartened by this. The most important thing is always what we deal with . . . humanity as it is, explicable or inexplicable: the life of the individual, of generations, and of nations, and at times the hand of God above them."

By suggesting that Ranke's statement did not imply more than what it said—in reducing it to its literal meaning—one does not want to say that it is insignificant. On the contrary, in its literal meaning it directs attention to an aspect of Ranke's achievement that has been frequently slighted, if not disregarded: I refer to the literary aspects of Ranke's work—specifically, his view that history is a part of literature. Showing the past as it had actually been meant not only establishing the facts as correctly as possible, but also placing them in their contemporary context in such a way that the past would come to life again.

For Ranke, a historian must be not only a critical investigator but also a writer. Ranke grew up in the classical age of German literature. His journals and notes show his admiration for Goethe and his steady interest in Goethe's works. For Ranke, like for many of his contemporaries, the novels of Walter Scott had been an important stimulus that awak-



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ened his interest in the events of former times, even though he was upset by the erroneous statements he found in them. He had no doubt that historical books were—or ought to be—works of literature. A confirmation of Ranke's concern with the literary qualities of his work might be found in the demonstration—given in an article by M. J. Zemlin, *Geschichte in Wissenschaft und Unterricht*, June 1986—that in later editions Ranke changed the statement that he wanted to *say* ("sagen"), "wie es eigentlich gewesen" into that he wanted to *show* ("zeigen") "wie es eigentlich gewesen."

Because little or no attention has been given to this implication of Ranke's statement, and because studies of Ranke are strangely lacking in appreciations of his literary art, our interpretation of its meaning might be appropriately supplemented by an examination—from the literary point of view—of the book on which Ranke worked throughout the decade following the publication of the *Geschichten der Germanischen und Romanischen Völker*—Ranke's first great masterwork, *The History of the Popes* (Bohn's Libraries, London, 1913).

As far as possible Ranke, in this work, avoids summary statements and lets the narrator disappear from the story so that the reader is directly confronted with facts and events. Ranke wants the reader to feel himself a participant of the story. Ranke's use of literary techniques allowed him to diminish the distance that separates past from present, to give the story a pattern that changes between forward movement and description, and, above all, to make the work conform to the primary requisite of a literary work: to tell a story that has a structure.

In order to make the reader aware that the past is not fundamentally different from the present, Ranke points out the continuities between past and present. Most of his readers, he assumes, live "on this side of the Alps," and he reminds them that life on the other side is even now somewhat different from that lived in Northern Europe. Nevertheless, much is the same. As at present, Italy in the sixteenth century was dominated by foreign powers, Ferrara was as "desolate and deserted" as it is now, Venice had its "beautiful blondes" for whom it is still famous. Then as now, Italians try to regain courage when something goes wrong by saying, "Oh, pazienza."

Travelers from Protestant Europe are drawn to Catholic Rome, Ranke writes, because it is "adorned with matchless works of art." Ranke arouses the reader's memory of Rome by making *The History of the Popes* a kind of guidebook: he explains the origin of Rome's most famous palaces and villas, like the Palazzo Farnese and the Villa Farnesina; he describes with technical detail the erection of one of Rome's landmarks, the obelisk on the square before St. Peter's; an entire section of the work is devoted to the building projects of Sixtus V, which gave the city its present vista. On the other hand, Ranke does not conceal that Rome saw also the beginning of what he and, he assumes, his contemporaries find repellent in modern architecture: its monotonous uniformity.

In Ranke's pages, people did not behave in the past very differently from the way they do now. When Pope Pius V encountered contradiction, he became "red in the face"; when Gregory XIII was annoyed, he slapped with his hands the arms of his chair. Pope Clement VIII was an indefatigable worker, as is shown by the detailed account that Ranke gives of his daily working schedule; Ranke adds that he did daily health exercises. Ranke does not simply state that a person was cruel or false; he demonstrates the brutality with which the Carafa Pope treated those who had offended him by telling the story of the humiliation he meted out to his niece, the young Marchesa Montebello, whose husband had been one of the pope's opponents. When she came from Naples to Rome, she found her Roman palace locked. No inn was willing to receive her; on a rainy night she drove from one inn to another until she was finally taken in by an innkeeper who lived so far distant from the city that he had not received the papal orders. Another example is the story through which Ranke indicates a change of the intellectual climate in the late sixteenth century. He writes that Aldus Manutius found "no admirers for his Greek or Latin; at the hour of his lectures, he might be seen pacing up and down before the portal of the university, with one or two hearers, the only persons in whom he found congeniality of sentiment or pursuit."

In accord with Ranke's reluctance to make



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judgments or abstract statements is his hesitancy to blame the character of the people with whom his book deals. He condemns the Borgia pope whose lascivious passions he believed met general censure. In general, however, he is less concerned with the virtues and vices of the popes than with the effects of their actions. His treatment of Pope Clement VII is an example. His character could not be faulted, but because of his political errors he was the "most disastrous of all popes." The manner in which Ranke presents his story is meant to allow the reader to build up his own picture of a person's character—as in a novel in which the good and bad sides of an individual emerge only gradually.

A remarkable display of his literary art is the manner in which Ranke, through different treatment of similar events, throws light on their changing importance. The conclaves of the earlier part of the sixteenth century are mentioned only very briefly; however, the qualities of the various cardinals, the negotiations that went on during the conclaves, and finally their outcome are extensively discussed in Ranke's treatment of the conclaves of the later sixteenth century, when the popes had begun to exert a steadily increasing influence on European politics. Ranke handles the distribution of space in a deliberate, but also majestic, manner. For instance, *The History of the Popes* contains a remarkably detailed report about a battle that decided what Ranke called "a little war," whereas only one paragraph, almost merely a single sentence, is devoted to the destruction of the Armada. There are reasons for this. The battle in the "little war" was fought with the methods and in the spirit of the Italian wars of the period from 1494 to 1531; it signified the end of this kind of warfare, and with this retrospection, the changes in military techniques and in the conduct of war in the following period stand out sharply and clearly. Little space is given to the defeat of the Armada because it is only an episode in a conflict that had started earlier and that continued, so that, despite its sensational character, the defeat of the Armada was not decisive and could not be considered as bringing about a change in the political scene. Whenever an event represented a turning point, it receives extended treatment: usually the account of diplomatic negotiations is restricted to a brief summary of their results, but the report about the negotiations that led to the absolution of Henry IV follows them carefully through all their stages. The long and detailed description that they receive indicates that these negotiations represented a decisive event in the religious struggle.

Because for Ranke a historical work was a work of literature, it had to be a story with a beginning and an end—it had to have, in other words, structure. *The History of the Popes* is not strictly a chronologically organized book. It is a work wound around one great theme: the relationship between state and church in Europe. At the outset Ranke states that the rise of Christianity involved separation of church and state, and that this was the "greatest, perhaps the most consequential characteristic of Christian times." From then on, the development of the relationship of these two powers becomes the dominating issue in European history. Originally, the church had been dependent on the state, but its need for independence required the creation of a secular church-state; in consequence, the church became involved in secular as well as in spiritual affairs. The history of the modern papacy—that is, the history that Ranke wrote—began when the secular and the spiritual interests of the papacy came in conflict with each other and when, simultaneously, the secularization of the church led to a spiritual opposition within the church. In the first three books of his work, Ranke lays out the tensions that resulted from these involvements and interrelationships, and this first part of the story reaches its conclusion when the worldly power of the church became consolidated, but also reduced to a relatively small area, so that the inner contradictions that had beset papal policy were eliminated and papal policy became subordinated to the reestablishment of the unity of the church. The following parts describe the progress that the papacy made in reestablishing the authority of the church in Europe. But it also shows that the success of the papacy reawakened the old tensions on a new level. In its fight against those who defected from the church, the papacy had to rely on secular allies; in consequence, among its allies the fear arose that they would become subordinate to the chief political protector of the papacy, the Hapsburgs. The popes themselves became fearful of the reemergence of the medieval situation,



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in which the popes had been dependent on the power of the emperor. Thus, at the time when victory seemed imminent, the Catholic camp lost its inner unity; some of its members supported the Protestants—for instance, France, which favored the entry of Sweden into the war against the Hapsburgs—and the pope himself encouraged some resistance against the further extension of Imperial power: "Catholicism seen as a unit could not stand its own victories." Thus, the conflict between secular and spiritual power, after having reached its high point and its crisis in the one hundred and fifty years between the beginning of the sixteenth century and the middle of the seventeenth century, ended in the establishment of a number of independent states, each of which gave to the relationship of its political and religious institutions its own form. "It cannot be imagined any longer to raise one or the other confession to universal rule. What is important is that all peoples, every state can develop their forces on the basis of their political-religious convictions. That is the foundation of the future of the world."

Ranke does not name a power that directs the course of events. He mentions a variety of forces as causing the developments of history. Ranke suggests that there is a "plan of a divine world government"; all human doings are subject to a "quiet and almost unnoticeable but powerful and irresistible force"; there is "necessity in events." Ranke also indicates that ideas might be the moving forces. The individual, as insignificant as he appears in the face of world history, is able to develop unexpected strength in the face of disaster. All that can be said is that there is constant movement in life; it moves either upwards or downwards. Those involved in the events and struggles of their time cannot know what the outcome will be and where events will lead. But that also gives the study of history its significance and value. Only retrospection reveals the meaning and the design in the developments of this world. "Every action of the past gives evidence of God, every moment preaches His name." The study of the past has a much greater aim than the teaching of morals or instruction in the conduct of politics. There is a priestly dignity in the historian's task to show "wie es eigentlich gewesen."



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# *Rembrandt Poems*

THOMAS CARPER

## *Rembrandt Prepares for a Walk Along the Amstel River*

Some days are for detail. An adventuring eye
Presents the house, the wagon with its load,
The boat, the windmill distant on the sky,
Each shrub and stalk, each rut etched in the road.
Others are inward days—the light in trees,
Not trees; not the horizon, but a wash
Of distance thinning on infinities;
Mind's arcs, and not the grasses of a marsh.
This day he gathers paper, brush, and pen
As he has done, now, countless times before,
Knowing the road that he will take again.
He feels, his hand unlatching the heavy door,
A rush of pleasurable expectancy.
Then he walks out to see what he will see.



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# *A Farmstead with a Hayrick and Weirs Beside a Stream*

*When he was about forty-six, Rembrandt made several drawings of the same farm.*

Perhaps it was the texture of the calm
That brought him back—the straight stakes of the weirs
Combing the stream; light blurring a tree's crown
Above a thick board wall; nets in the air's
Warm ruffle; and the hayrick, yellow and high,
Dense as the dwelling's thatch. Perhaps it was
The sense of an entire prosperity
Not got by owning, but bestowed—because
Here the clear eye could have, the pen could keep,
The terrace with its rail, the browsing cows,
The watery, reedy tufts beside the steep
Banks, the ducks, the whole of farm and house
And all beyond, even beyond the brink
Of space beginning at the edge of ink.

✪ THOMAS CARPER teaches English at the University of Southern Maine in Gorham. His work has appeared in *Poetry*, the *Antioch Review*, and other journals.



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# Cowboy

JOHN P. SISK

I once saw in the southeastern corner of the Villa Borghese in Rome an abbreviated version of an American amusement park. It had bumper cars, spaceships, and live Shetland ponies whose dung no one had bothered to collect. There was also a coin-operated mechanical horse. I watched it galloping in place as its small and excited rider pulled a toy gun from his holster and fired at his imaginary adversary—perhaps that Bulgarian desperado who a few days before had shot the pope. It occurred to me that in time he might become one of those motorcycle cowboys—urban rustlers, actually—who dart in close to the crowded Roman sidewalks and pick off women's shoulder bags. In any event, he took me halfway around the world to my own cowboy country in a way that nothing else in Rome did, not even the great equestrian statue in the Piazza del Campidoglio that represents a bareheaded Marcus Aurelius who, had he worn a sombrero, might have ridden with John Wayne in *Red River*.

No one is as enthralled with the legend of the cowboy as a child is. The young Roman was lucky: unlike so many American youngsters, he would not have to grow up to discover the discrepancy between the legend and the reality. I was spared that painful discovery by becoming a part-time cowboy myself. At the age of ten, I spent a good deal of the summer on horseback carrying water to harvesters and driving cows in from pasture. For a dozen years thereafter, I spent the summers on the wheat and cattle ranches of southeastern Washington doing all those things that cowboys do, and more besides. Between summers I was back in the city doing such things as city people do. As a result I grew up with a perspective on city and country that was different from that of most of my contemporaries. In fact, I got to be rather smug about my ability to see past the stereotypical distortions that city and country took to be the truth about one another.

John R. Erickson makes it clear in his good book *The Modern Cowboy* that all cowboys are part-time cowboys—that is, they don't spend all their time superintending cattle on the wide open spaces where the coyotes howl and the wind blows free. They have to build and repair fences, clean the stables, slop the pigs, milk the cows, get in the hay, repair machinery, on occasion even perform such soft chores as feeding the chickens, gathering the eggs, and working in the vegetable garden. On the wheat and cattle ranches where I worked, I might spend many hours escorting cattle in and out of the arid summer pastures of the Snake River canyons, counting the herd, searching for strays, checking on the condition of water holes, and doing my bit with the branding team, but I spent many more hours doing the things that wheat farmers did when they still depended largely on horse power.

Between William S. Hart's *Hell's Hinges* (1916) and Lawrence Kasden's *Silverado* (1985), the Western movie is peopled mainly by cowboy types, but the viewer sees relatively little real cowboy life. In the scores of Westerns I have seen, no cowboy ever milks a cow, fixes a fence, hauls hay, or pitches manure out of a barn. Such pedestrian activities would be as inappropriate for the movie cow-

JOHN P. SISK, Arnold Professor of the Humanities Emeritus at Gonzaga University, is the author of *Person and Institution*. His essays and reviews have appeared in *Harper's*, the *Atlantic*, and other magazines.



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boy as domestic chores would have been for Homer's Achilles. To be interesting to the movies, the cowboy has to exist at the pitch of myth, which means that to define himself he has to get quickly into the right kind of trouble. The housekeeping chores that consumed so much of the real cowboy's life promised only the kind of trouble you need for comedy or farce, of which there is very little in the Western. From the Western you can learn how to foil rustlers, crooked bankers, greedy cattle barons, and rampaging Indians, or how to outdraw a gunslinger at high noon or face down a braggart in a saloon (meanwhile looking as hypnotically steely-eyed as Bill Hart does in *The Desert Man*), but not how to be a cowboy. For that you need a book such as Erickson's.

Of course, even real cowboys, like real policemen, real soldiers, real pro-football stars, or even real college professors, need to see themselves in legendary terms: it is a way of incorporating the inevitable humdrum of life into a significant pattern. Leslie Fiedler, being at the time a transplanted Easterner, though not even a part-time cowboy, wrote a famous essay entitled "Montana; or the End of Jean-Jacques Rousseau," in which he notes the paradox of real cowboys standing in line to see a Roy Rogers movie, apparently not bothered by the gap between reality and myth. By the time I read Fiedler's essay, I had become a cowboy emeritus, but I found those Roy Rogers fans easy to understand, albeit I much preferred Tom Mix and Hoot Gibson. Once I had become a real cowboy and prided myself on knowing the reality behind the myth, I became an avid fan of Western movies. I had no more trouble suspending my disbelief than do those wrestling fans about whom Roland Barthes writes brilliantly in *Mythologies*. The movies even glamorized the humdrum of my summertime world. The bank, the pool parlor (once a saloon), and the weather-beaten two-story hotel in my small ranch town all connoted the world of the Western movie, though nobody had ever robbed the bank, few people stayed in the hotel, and in the pool hall the lounging ranch hands drank beer or cola instead of whisky and played rummy, not poker. So, in the rock-ribbed desolate canyons, there was always the romantic possibility of rustlers, even though the likely thing was that the steers I was missing could be found a few miles away in a neighbor's pasture where the grass was greener.

No doubt there were fewer six-shooters in the real West than the movies have led us to believe. My grandfather, who after having been discharged from General Sherman's army came to the West in the days when it was truly wild and there were as yet no mythical cowboys, wore his gun only when he went into town, and he lived into his nineties without having fired it at anyone. However, when Leslie Fiedler came West in the early 1940s, the movies had made the gun standard equipment, and the owner usually kept it beside him even when he went to bed. Robert Warshow, in one of the best things ever written about the Western movie, wrote that the latter's "values are in the image of a single man who wears a gun on his thigh." I find it easy to understand why real-life gunless cowboys, to say nothing of Roman youngsters, continue to find irresistible this image of a gun-supported autonomy. Nevertheless, I never wore a gun when I rode into the canyons alone. Sometimes when I was with a friend, we did take along a rifle, hoping to shoot a coyote and share the five-dollar bounty, but we always missed.

The only man I knew who routinely packed a gun was the town marshal, a rangy Gary Cooper type who once in a drunken fantasy emptied his six-shooter into the woodwork beneath the counter of the town's only short-order restaurant. He was overpowered and locked up in his own jail overnight, certainly a departure from all familiar Western scenarios. Indeed, I was not to experience some sense of the swaggering security that gun toting gives one until, late in World War II in the jungles of British Guiana, I was required periodically to wear my forty-five pistol. Even then my sense of security was undercut by the knowledge that, like most Air Corps officers, I had never been able to qualify with the weapon. If, as some credulous souls believed, the jungles were crawling with voodoo-worshiping cannibals and German spies who had been shipped up the Demerara River by submarine, they would have been in no more danger from me than the Snake River coyotes had been.

Robert Warshow, of course, in his essay is talking about the Westerner, and not all West-



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erners were or are cowboys, whether in or out of the movies, and, as Henry Nash Smith reminds us in *Virgin Land*, until late in the nineteenth century, *cowboy* was likely to designate an armed, hell-raising desperado who would not have hesitated to shoot a pope if one had been available. In the movies, however, there is always the implication that any Westerner can function as a cowboy if he does not have more important things to do, which he generally does. In any event, insofar as the Westerner was a cowboy, the horse was as important to him as the gun, in fact as well as in image. Certainly no mode of conveyance ever gave a man such a sense of being comfortably and masterfully at ease in his environment as the horse did. To view the world from a horse's back when you are young is to view it from an Olympian height; a lone horseman coming into view at a mesa's rim is like the appearance of a god; and, as for a spine-tingling sense of speed, nothing compares with the pursuit of a steer while on a horse at full gallop. When, years later, through the fortunes of war I became a troop commander for the Air Transport Command and had my own jeep and driver, I experienced nothing like the mounted cowboy's sense of total command.

To understand this is to understand why horses in Western movies—Tom Mix's Tony, Gene Autry's Champion, Roy Rogers's Trigger, the Lone Ranger's Silver, Ken Maynard's Tarzan—could be as famous in their own right as the horses of Homer's superstars. Only the rustlers and the robbers of banks and stagecoaches had anonymous, and usually uncurried, horses. Even in movies where the cowboy hero wins the girl and is obviously on the verge of becoming a husband, you are more likely to remember the horse's name than the girl's. This means that such movies, unlike Shakespeare's romantic comedies, are generally only half-hearted celebrations of marriage; at heart they are less about the winning and civilizing of the West, which means making it safe for women and children, than about keeping it as a preserve for the unfettered male and his noble steed.

On the ranches where I worked, not only the noble steeds but all horses that were full-fledged members of the work force had names. This was a practical necessity, of course, but it was also an expression of the creaturely closeness between man and animal that is one of the many good things about ranch life. The intimacy, however, never extended to steers and cows, perhaps out of a sense that to name what is destined to be eaten is to flirt with cannibalism. This suggests that, if the Australian philosopher Peter Singer and his fellow vegetarians want to convert the rest of us, they might begin by agitating for a law that requires all edible animals to be named at birth. Ranch children are good models here; they name their pet pigs, calves, rabbits, and ducks, and they are notoriously reluctant to have their pets butchered.

My first horse was a geriatric blue mare named Bess who in crisis circumstances could be goaded into a belly-rumbling trot. The horse I rode in my last cowboy years was named Colonel, a neurotic eleven-hundred-pounder (the boss guessed he was part Hambletonian) who could outrun the fastest steer but could be spooked by a suddenly emerging ground squirrel or the mildest dog. His previous owner, who had ridden into the canyons to check his herd, was found dead there—of a heart attack, they said, but I suspected that Colonel, making one of his unpredictable changes of direction, had pitched him onto the rocks. Once when we were pursuing a steer pell-mell along one of the narrow cattle trails that terrace the shaggy sides of the breaks, Colonel detected a rattlesnake in the bush ahead of us. He was instantly airborne, and we landed without missing a stride ten feet below on the next trail. If he had thrown me to my death down that precipice he would not have mourned for me, as Achilles' immortal horses mourned for the slain Patroclus, but I loved him nevertheless and would no more have eaten him than Tom Mix would have eaten Tony.

The dismal truth was that my Colonel, unlike Tom Mix's Tony, had no character, and character was what the Western hero, on or off his horse, had in abundance. The movies in which he appears might be ambivalent about the value of civilizing the wilderness, but his values otherwise are traditional enough, and in their service he transcends himself, as heroes should. He has the stalwart individualism that Crèvecoeur and Emerson admired in the American farmer, even if the life of a



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farmer would be far too dull for him. Virginia Mayo, looking wonderful in frontier garb, sings in *The Big Land* that "she leaned on a man who bent like a blade of grass," defining by contrast the proper Western man who ultimately wins her. The latter, not unexpectedly, turns out to be Alan Ladd, who is anything but Robert J. Lifton's Protean Man. Protean Man bends like a blade of grass on principle lest he be uptightly boxed in by a value system that wants to mortgage him to the past. In the Western, even the rustlers and the bank robbers, the men with the black hats and the scruffy horses, are boxed in, doing anything for a buck, on principle, with their own kind of heroic determination, which is not exactly what Lifton had in mind when he coined the phrase in the late 1960s.

As a matter of fact, a great deal of the attraction of the Western hero derives from the fact that he is mortgaged to the past. He might live on fast horses in a milieu of violent action, but culturally he lives in a slow world and his character tends to keep it slow. This was especially noticeable to a city boy returning annually from the speedy city, even though few real cowboys had character the way Bill Hart or Tom Mix had it. In time I came to suspect, however, that ranch people generally did not really have more character than city people, they simply had fewer opportunities to corrupt whatever character they had—which may be a rather negative way of conceding that Thomas Jefferson's agrarian bias had more behind it than wishful thinking.

In any event, the paradoxical combination of fast and slow in the cowboy's world may help to explain the lack of interest in politics I have noted among real and mythical cowboys. Both share the American's suspicion that politicians are out to change things, usually in their own interests, and that they threaten to increase the tempo of life in areas that, if anything, need to be slowed down. Once in the city I was invited to a party that turned out to have been organized by young Communists. They were humorlessly and passionately in favor of very rapid changes, and the cowboy in me was immediately suspicious of them. Being at the time a month away from my return to the ranch, I could only wonder why anyone could want to be a Communist and huddle together with others he called comrades if he could be a cowboy who prided himself on his ability to go it alone. Certainly both mythical and real cowboys had their share of that independence of spirit that in the thirties and forties made it so hard for some American writers to be the docile, true-believing Stalinists that they tried hard to be. It might not be too much to say that those who ultimately lost the faith were saved because they were cowboys at heart, mortgaged to a past that had taught them to be suspicious of all promises of a gloriously gregarious final roundup.

No doubt the cowboy's lack of interest in politics is connected with his famous taciturnity. In Emerson's essay on farming, in which you can find an early celebration of many of the virtues of the Western hero, he remarks, "Cities force growth and make men talkative and entertaining, but they make them artificial." Loquacity and politics go together, which is why, in the Western, politics is usually either missing or identified as one of the ways the glib city people waste their time and mess up the country. Politicians are fast-talkers, which means that politics is fundamentally a shell game—a cowboy bias widely shared by city people. You cannot imagine Bill Hart, Buck Jones, or Hopalong Cassidy joining the Communist party, but neither can you imagine them campaigning for anybody. The act would violate their implied laissez-faire conservatism with its Rambo-like assumption that what the country needs is not politics but virtue—a dangerous assumption for a democracy in which it is so likely that, when the political talking stops, the rustlers begin to take over.

Of course, the Western hero, cowboy or not, turns out in the end to be a politician in his own fashion: he simply uses his six-shooter to settle problems about the just use and distribution of power, which, if they are not settled quickly, will soon overwhelm his ability to cope with them and thus cast him adrift into the culturally fast world that he abhors. This is also the politics of the not especially talkative rustlers, those greedy traditionalists who would very much prefer that the world remain as it is. But step outside the charmed circle of the Western, and this becomes simply the politics of the preventive first strike, which we have learned to see as one of the means



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that democracy uses to disguise its fear of itself as a virtue.

I learned early that ranch folk are not as taciturn as the movies or Emerson would lead one to believe—possibly because they had to rely less on that conversation stopper, the six-shooter. The town marshal could be noncommittal enough, but when I knew him better, I realized that he had little to say because there wasn't much on his mind. Certainly there were no political implications one way or another in his iron-jawed taciturnity: he had not been elected to his position but appointed, probably because he looked like a marshal to begin with and could supply a gun. Otherwise, ranch folk could be loquacious enough, however suspicious they might be of fast-talking city slickers. Sometimes I rode Colonel into town by moonlight just to listen to the garrulous old-timers, as they lounged outside the short-order restaurant, reminisce about the heroic olden times.

The fabled taciturnity of the Western hero and allied pastoral types in our culture appeals to a widespread conviction that actions speak louder than words, are more honest than words, and may very well be grounded on positions of philosophic integrity that a Socrates would quickly obfuscate with his verbosity. Thus it is easy for poets and storytellers, including moviemakers, to imagine that a cowboy, blessed with great stretches of time when he is alone with nature, cannot avoid dwelling on the eternal verities. This is the message one reads on Bill Hart's wonderful face, and the repetitions of it on subsequent if often lesser faces is one reason why Leslie Fiedler saw real cowboys standing in line to see Roy Rogers. As for myself, I liked the aloneness of ranch life but had little traffic with the eternal verities. Whether I was milking a fractious cow, finishing the spring plowing behind a not too reliable nine-horse team, or searching the treacherous canyons for missing steers, I had to keep my mind on the business at hand. The eternal verities I put on hold until I was back in college, where I was encouraged to read pastoralizers like Wordsworth and Rousseau, who probably would have liked Bill Hart.

A part-time cowboy was bound to be aware of the sartorial difference between himself and movie cowboys. I did not look even remotely like Roy Rogers or Tom Mix, or that commercialized Westerner, the Marlboro Man, who, give him his manly due, is about as concerned with the surgeon general's warning as Buck Rogers would have been. I wore waist-length denim overalls, not jeans (Calvin Klein and Ralph Lauren were a long way in the future), an undecorated blue cotton shirt, ten-inch boots (cowboy boots were too expensive and not very practical once I was afoot), a red bandanna that could be pulled over my nose when the dust was flying, and a wide-brimmed straw hat (the Marlboro Man would have been ashamed to wear it, but he did not have to endure the summer's heat).

I never wore the chaps that hung moldering in the barn (they were too hot in the summer) nor spurs (one touch of them would have sent Colonel into orbit). My belt and buckle lacked tooling and logo and simply held up my pants. Elaborate buckles, preferably engraved from models in the Cowboy Hall of Fame, are now de rigueur with Western buffs; the Gene Autry buckle even has the great man's signature on the back, and no doubt costs a good deal more than my entire outfit did. Sometimes I carried a lasso coiled on the saddle horn, but it was mainly decoration: I was about as accurate with it, in spite of sporadic practice on fence posts, as I would later be with the army forty-five pistol. It pleases me to learn now that, dressing without folderol, I dressed very much the way Erickson describes the modern cowboy—except that the latter is much more belt- and buckle-conscious than I or most of my contemporaries could afford to be. When, during World War II, I saw *Oklahoma!* in New York, I saw my kind of cowboy clothes on stage, as I did thirty-five years later when I saw the splendid revival of the musical in London. The continuity was comforting: I was still in fashion.

To judge from his current advertisements, the millionaire designer Ralph Lauren appears to side with me rather than the Marlboro Man: his dungarees "are crafted in the spirit of an era when quality and durability were more important than fashion." They even feature "an authentic button fly," which identifies them with the world of Bill Hart in which zippered trousers would have been a sure sign of the effete Easterner. Lauren, I note in a recent issue of the fashion tabloid *W*, has



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himself become a part-time cowboy, having purchased a ten-thousand acre cattle ranch in southern Colorado, where he spends as much time as he can, far from the plastic East where a man can lose his soul. He rides over his land on an expensive Appaloosa (in the Great Depression my unpedigreed Colonel cost less than a hundred dollars) and raises cattle without the chemicals or hormones that encourage dangerous accumulations of cholesterol in human eaters. He works the roundup with his crew, but I wonder if he has ever spent a dusty summer's day holding down fledgling bulls so they could be branded and turned into steers, or if he has committed himself morning and evening to the milking of a range cow that had delivered her first calf and was still wild as a mountain lion.

I detect in Lauren—pictured in a voguishly faded denim jacket with casually peeled back cuffs, an open-neck plaid shirt, and a handsomely weather-beaten sombrero—not so much the real cowboy unself-consciously attired for the day's work as the city slicker trying hard not to appear like one. He displays, in fact, all the signs of the covert dandy who knows just how far he can go before he becomes the cynosure that the overt dandy is. He would not be caught dead looking like those flamboyantly attired artifical Westerners I once saw sitting on the top rail of a fence as that noblest of steeds, the Great Northern's Empire Builder, rolled into Montana's Glacier Park. I observed them with a priggish scorn that animated the newspaper feature I later wrote about them. Had they any idea how red in tooth and claw their cultish West could be? Had they ever seen a panicked horse pull its foot off to get free from barbed wire, or come up to a water hole at the head of a ravine to find beside it what the coyotes had left of a missing calf?

In Erickson's *Modern Cowboy*, the dandy impulse appears to be confined to belt and buckle, but it comes full flower in proportion as the cowboy becomes an entertainer, whether in the gaudy splendor of Buffalo Bill or the off-duty rodeo performer. Designers catering to the dandy impulse have been exploiting the cowboy for a long time but never so vigorously as now. In a recent issue of *Elle*, the Western motif is everywhere, most notably in a nine-page feature that models "cowboy chic" in its various guises. This is no less true of men's magazines such as *Esquire* and *GQ*. Dude ranches, with or without hot tubs and happy hours, never had it so good; and on Sunday morning television, old Western movies are as hard to avoid in my part of the world as Bible-beating evangelists.

Everybody, apparently, wants to be a part-time cowboy. Perhaps we suffer from the fear that if we let the cowboy go completely out of our lives we not only will lose contact with an important source of our national integrity but will have to face up to the technological complexity of our plastic and zippered world and get back to worrying about Star Wars and OPEC. Or, to put it more aesthetically, perhaps cowboy chic, like punk chic or safari chic, is an expression of the belief that self-identification and survival are ultimately a matter of style—and when in this need the ego becomes sufficiently inflamed, we have that hero of style, the dandy. Smart people like Ralph Lauren know this and get rich as they prove over and over again that the superintendent of the census was wrong when he declared in 1890 that the American frontier was closed.

Such speculations were far in the future as I spent my last days on horseback. The boss had been injured, and I found myself in charge of the last stationary threshing outfit in my part of the West, where combine harvesters had become as common as cheat grass. I rose at four in the morning, saddled Colonel, and rode out along the rim of the canyons while the dawn came up Homerically rosy-fingered. I could pick out cattle halfway down in the breaks and, far below them, the silver beaches along the river where the sand ran through one's fingers like sugar. At the outfit, I tied Colonel to the trap wagon, and for fifteen hours did all the things necessary to keep the wheat coming out of one spout and straw out of another—things that had no place in even the most pedestrian Western movie. At eight in the evening, after the crew had gone back to the ranch for supper, Colonel and I returned along the rim of the canyons as they filled up with night. The previous summer we had spent an afternoon down there looking for a valuable young bull that had gone roving, the way young bulls will. We found him at sundown, drove him all night, and locked him



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into the corral in the rosy-fingered dawn. I slept two hours and rose to spend the day with the branding team.

Colonel was fourteen that last summer, late middle age for a horse. He was losing the edge of his speed, and the ground squirrels no longer spooked him—sure signs that his cowboy days were coming to an end. When the harvest was over, he went his way and I mine. I thought no more about him until, returning from Europe many summers later, a change in routing brought me over my wild, rock-tumbled canyons. As I watched them from twenty-thousand feet, I thought of that pregnant moment in the Western movie when a panoramic shot of the endlessly wonderful country is prologue to the appearance of that man of destiny, the lone and urgent rider. I felt then as if I had been the last cowboy.

# *From a Photograph*

DON STAP

In your checkered dress, Kristine
you are smiling,
your blond hair diffused in the angelic light of a poor exposure.
You are seven or eight,
wearing white anklets and shoes with buckles
standing with your hands behind your back.
But where is the farm on Territorial Road
and the fruit orchards of Coloma?
Where is the black bread and blood sausage
and where is Latvia, that dark stain on Russia's shoulder?
All I can see is a hedgerow behind you,
marigolds and chrysanthemums gone wild
in the saffron light of October.
But of course I know where they are—the trains of 1944
are still lugging their cargo westward, and your father
is still on that bicycle in Poland trying to catch up.
So why do I wonder how we will manage across the years
and how we will find each other?
I look again. You are still standing there
happy, or maybe only smiling for the camera.
Someone snapped the shutter
and somehow missed almost everything.

DON STAP teaches creative writing at the University of Central Florida, Orlando. His work has appeared in *Poetry, Poetry Northwest, International Wildlife,* and *Sierra.*



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# Letter from Madrid

## A View from the Street

THOMAS SWICK

The day I arrived in Madrid, my friends Sonia and Rafael, whom I had not seen in three years, with the newest member of their family, two-year-old Guillermo, took me on a quick car tour of the capital. Rafa is an internist about to finish his residency at one of the city's hospitals; Sonia is an editor who had recently gotten a job after several frustrating months of free-lancing. I thought it excessively courteous of them each to take the day off to welcome me; but they explained that I had arrived on the feast day of San Isidro, the patron saint of Madrid.

We drove through the Salamanca district—Madrid's exclusive neighborhood, they said, and the only one in the city with a grid pattern of streets—while we were catching up on news. Sonia told of her new job, which had come about in the unspectacular manner of answering an ad in the newspaper. On the basis of her résumé she was called in, with twenty-nine other applicants, to take an exam on various aspects of publishing: writing, editing, proofreading, and so forth. Not overly confident after this, she nevertheless received a telegram a few days later requesting that she report again to the office for an interview. There she found that the field had been narrowed to eight. The interview—which included a conversation in English—went well, though she still did not allow herself to become too hopeful. Several days later a call came with the news that she had the job. The magazine, she said, is called *Gourmetour Spain* and is published in English by the National Institute for the Promotion of Exports, which is a part of the Ministry of Economy and Finance. Distributed in the United Kingdom, the United States, and Canada, it covers tourism and gastronomy and has as its mission "the promotion of Spanish agricultural products."

There has been a considerable amount of recent foreign investment in Spain (Rafa pointed out to me their "Manhattan"—a region of tall glass towers at the northern end of the Castellana), but unemployment is nevertheless a major problem facing the government, not to mention the unemployed. The unemployment rate is the highest in Western Europe: it is nearly 50 percent for those in their late teens and early twenties. The concurrent inactivity (or prospect of it) for a large segment of the population—especially one as perpetually restless as the young—has made for uneasiness in Madrid. Still, as Sonia noted when she wrote to me about it, "the cafés are full."

Rafa and Sonia, who, being in their mid-twenties, are just a few years beyond the age group hardest hit by unemployment, are content that at least she has a stable income and that Rafa soon will be looking for a post. Positions for doctors can be found in the countryside, such as in La Mancha ("a boring place," Rafa commented, which reminded me of Edmund Wilson's admission that he had never made it through *Don Quixote* for reasons of ennui), but they are much more scarce in Madrid.

At one of the stoplights downtown we were approached by a fit, unshaven man, poorly but

✪ THOMAS SWICK is a writer whose work has appeared in *Commonweal* and the *North American Review*.



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tidily dressed. Rafa reflexively dug into his pocket and handed out some coins. "You will see that a lot in Madrid now," he said to me after the beggar had retreated. Later, at the major intersections outside the center of Madrid, we came upon men selling packages of Kleenex.

Taking a left turn from the mendicant, we came into the Puerta del Sol, long the heart of the city. George Borrow, in his book *The Bible in Spain; or, the Journeys, Adventures, and Imprisonments of an Englishman in An Attempt to Circulate the Scriptures in the Peninsula* (1834), wrote of the square: "It is at all times of the year, the great place of assemblage for the idlers of the capital, poor or rich." Sonia and Rafa mentioned that it is the popular place of congregation on New Year's Eve, when every citizen gathered there drops a grape into his mouth at each toll of the bell at midnight. Yet on this day, the feast of San Isidro, the square was quiet.

We drove down more dormant streets (not an early riser, I was not to see the city this tranquil again) and spotted landmarks. Crossing the meager Manzanares River, my friends told me of the civic project a few years back to clean the river and of the ceremony that had followed—somewhat irreverently received—to establish a family of ducks upon it. Shortly after, we came to the Gran Vía, drove down past the Plaza de España, zipped by the Egyptian Temple, and, turning down some small streets of shuttered shops and balconied apartments, arrived home.

My friends' apartment is on the sixth and top floor of one of the street's more modern buildings. They have both lived in the city most of their lives, and in this building for four years. As is customary in Madrid, there are two apartments to every floor (which explains why addresses often carry the puzzling letters *dcha*—the abbreviation for "right"—and *izqda*—the same for "left"), and each gives on to a small octagonal courtyard in the center. From the open windows, laundry lines can be handily run and the utterances of neighbors effortlessly heard. This latter possibility is less a problem for Sonia and Rafa than it might be for some residents, for living across the way, with their own infant, are Sonia's sister and her husband, Rafa's brother. The closeness of Spanish families being what it is, anything heard inadvertently through the window would, we can assume, be learned eventually viva voce from the sibling. Which is to say, in their case the resonance of the courtyard does not so much reveal information as occasionally expedite its passage.

News of my arrival soon went through the living-room window to Pilar standing in her bedroom, and she and her husband Jorge, with their son, paid a visit by coming around, which for some reason struck me as strange, to the door. The sisters both speak English fluently, the brothers hardly at all. Rafa has recently improved his English by going once a week to evening classes where a middle-aged English expatriate professor sprinkles his lessons with linguistic jokes, some of which are ancient.

A Spaniard, Rafa began, goes to London and one day finds he needs a pair of socks. Having forgotten the word for sock, and being too proud to point to the desired item on his leg, he tells the shop assistant that he would like an article of clothing. The assistant offers a shirt. The Spaniard says no. He offers a tie. The same. He goes through pants, sweaters, hats, and shoes. Finally, he picks up a pair of socks. The Spaniard, in joyful recognition, exclaims, "¡Eso si que es!" "Well," the shop assistant says sourly, "if you knew all along how to spell it, why couldn't you just tell me what it was?"

After some sherry and harsh salami, we all set out on an evening stroll. Following Garcia de Paredes to its end, we joined the Paseo de la Castellana, a tree-lined promenade that coexists for its entire length with one of the city's most heavily trafficked streets. Here I got my first look at the living city. On every block a new outdoor café—its busy tables neatly corralled by potted plants—quartered a society more effulgent, it seemed, than the previous one. "Madrid is very fashionable now," Sonia said to me, half sarcastically I thought, and Pilar carefully delineated for me the "current" coteries and their cafés. The infants slumbered in their strollers. (Guillermo and his cousin were pushed far past the Biblioteca Nacional and the bedtime of any well-loved American child, early learning the late-night rigors of Spanish social life.) Though tomorrow was a workday, the length of the Paseo was crowded with Madrileños meeting friends, escaping family, and walking



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in that relaxed, unhurried way of a people respectful of leisure.

On one of my first mornings in Madrid, I went shopping with Sonia, which meant going a few blocks down the street with a handcart. Everything is available within that range. Next door is a flower shop; across the street is a grocery. On the next block stands the Churrería, to which Rafa would often run in the morning to buy the deep-fried curls of dough we dipped into our breakfast chocolate. Down the street a bit, in the meat shop, butchers take orders between dangling salamis. There is an elegant, older shop on the corner selling pasta. Nearby, a bakery offers the tasteless loaves that Spaniards eat daily, and numerous desiccated desserts. Over on the right is the indoor market full of stalls—fish (the mongers dressed in their thinly striped aprons of green and black), fruit and vegetables, nuts and grains, beef, poultry, spices, eggs, and bread. On the way back, if one is thirsty, there are numerous cafés; on the corner next to the apartment is a German restaurant. A few doors up is the Copenhagen Sex Shop. Sonia told me one night that in the four years she has lived here she has seen only two people enter. "Yeah," replied Jorge, "me and Rafa." To conclude the shopping we stopped at a primitive mini-market whose shelves were full of unpacked products. The management allows its customers lower prices by requiring them to take the articles out of their boxes. As a final errand, we bought a newspaper at a kiosk.

Seeing a kiosk, one finds it difficult to imagine any editor without work in Spain, for the kiosks are layered with—seemingly made of—magazines: the periodical equivalent of a house of cards. Although every kiosk carries the same fare, I could never pass by one without stopping to gaze at the colorful shuffle of faces, headlines, and inverted exclamation points.

One need look no further than the kiosk for a sign of modern Spain. Spanish-language editions of *Playboy* and *Penthouse* are prominently displayed, as are more native versions of such magazines. Buy the respected daily *El Pais* and you will find in the classified ads, under the heading Servicios-Relax, an alphabetized list of the names and telephone numbers of call girls.

International magazines of fashion are plentiful. Design, Sonia told me, is the profession of the moment. There is a joke that in the old days when a boy met a girl he would ask her politely, "Do you study or do you work?" Now the appropriate question is, "Do you study or do you design?" Off the boulevards one sees long streets taken over by boutiques. Walking down such a street one day, I saw an establishment that called itself "pullovería" (using the common ending of "ería" after the name of the product sold, as in "frutería," "cervezería").

Popular sellers are the gossip magazines, especially *¡Hola!* (Hello) and *La Revista* (The Magazine), which seem to support themselves largely by reporting on the activities of the ubiquitous Julio Iglesias and his ex-wife. These publications are known familiarly as "magazines of the heart," less kindly as "magazines of the liver" and "magazines of the private parts." Even those who don't read them seem acquainted with their news.

The occasionally jarring sight in Madrid today is the unemployed man spread next to his donation cup on the pavement, or the abandoned mother, also at one's feet, clutching a child. One evening while sitting in the Plaza de España, I was approached by a young Gypsy man who pulled his shoe-shine box in my direction and said in the most calm voice I had heard in Spain, "para comer" (to eat). With the aging of the Civil War generation and the concept of industrial safety, there is no longer the great number of amputees about that caused Gerald Brenan to write, "Spaniards are very careless of their safety and shed their limbs with the facility of crabs." Blind lottery vendors still sell their tickets, occupying street corners like homely monuments to national trustworthiness. It is a great relief to many people that the legalizing of slot machines, which can be found singly in bars or occupying whole game rooms off the street, has not relieved these blind invalids of a livelihood. Their lilting cry of "Lotería," softer than I remember it ten years ago, is still the distinctive sign to foreigners that they are in Spain.

Walking around the city, one finds the men in light-colored, short-sleeved shirts, amply unbuttoned and often displaying a gold chain or two. They shuffle along in patent black loafers. Sportcoats, if worn, are frequently draped over the shoulders, with the arms



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pugilistically left out of the sleeves. Women, smartly dressed and in heels, usually show less décolletage. There is one particular type of woman seen frequently, who wears her dark hair pulled back tightly into a braid (thus accentuating the taut, angular features of her tanned face) and possesses a classical, seemingly unapproachable beauty, though, I suppose, not for Spanish men. "Piropo"—street flirting involving excessive and highly creative flattery—still exists, I was told, with little complaint. Sonia told me the story that after the birth of her son she suffered temporarily from Bell's palsy, which paralyzed the left half of her face and caused that eye to close. She had felt very self-conscious about this (Jorge had taken to calling her "the Pirate") until one day on her shopping rounds she received a few words of "piropo." She felt better for days.

Teenagers are dressed conventionally in blouses several sizes too big for them and trousers several inches too short. Children, the beloved centers of attention in any setting in which they find themselves, are immaculate, coiffed, and, sartorially at least, deserving of the attention. One of my lasting impressions of the Spanish concerns the care they take in dressing their children. Couples and families both travel in various degrees of linkage: I particularly liked the elder daughters who walk slightly behind their fathers or mothers, with a hand reached up and clasping a parental shoulder. This pose is demonstrated by a flamenco troupe on a postcard of supreme ugliness that I purchased several copies of. (The bold, polka-dot dresses of the women—inspired, I suppose, by the unrelieved sight in the south of red hills dotted with dark olive trees—must vie for the least aesthetically pleasing of all the world's folk costumes.) When I showed the card at home, Sonia told me that the same card is sold with fabric glued to the dancers' dresses, and the cautionary note—in consideration of mailmen's sensibilities?—that they must be sent inside envelopes.

In the evenings we would often go to cafés, usually stopping next door for Rafa's brother. Jorge is a lawyer and habitué of the nearby Café Benito, a plain establishment with fluorescent lighting. Its tables were scattered over the sidewalk. He favors it, he said, for its dirt (which in Spanish is the succulent sounding *suciedad*) and the obese cook whom he calls, affectionately, "El Gordo." My first night there I was surprised to see this roly-poly, though hardly immense, character. Here we ate from common plates "patatas bravas" (french fries served in a tasty garlic sauce), fried calamaries, fried "chipirones" (smaller squid), and bread, all washed down with cold beer. We watched as the pile of paper napkins covered the floor. It is the custom in cafés—not only Benito's—to drop any and all scraps to the ground where they amass around the feet of patrons until they're swept up with a long-handled broom at closing time. An American I know was once rebuked when he decorously deposited a paper into his coat pocket. "Drop it," ordered the proprietor. "If the floor is clean, people will think I run an unpopular place and not come in." This policy of "laissez-tomber" is practiced on the streets as well, an unfortunate circumstance in a city where one cannot walk far without being handed reams of leaflets, lately of scarcely the most edifying kind (Learn aerobics, English, piano, Pascal).

On other nights we would head, always with Guillermo in his stroller, toward the university quarter. To get there we walked down a dark, leafy avenue of elegant residential buildings, their great carved-wood portals and blue street numbers reminiscent of Paris. Here we would eat more seafood—shrimp, clams, mussels, and a delicious fried fish self-promotionally called "bien me sabe" (it tastes good to me). When not eating, we drank: beer, wine, or "horchata"—the sweet, milky liquid made from ground almonds and served with crushed ice.

Down the street we came to a plaza, lively—no matter the hour—with people. The chairs of a corner café would be spilled out onto the street, appropriating, in that offhand, southern European manner, a public space for personal use. Nowhere in daily life is the importance of the individual over the State seen more vividly than in the picture of the Spaniard (or Italian, or Greek) quietly sipping coffee at a makeshift table in the street. Children ignorant of curfews played tag around two dowagers sipping lemon drinks under the stars. Further along, young people—it is somehow difficult, seeing them so night after night, to call them "students"—filled a small



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street, sitting on parked cars with their wine glasses and leaning against shop walls.

It is this "street life"—continued, in fact amplified, in the capital—that makes Spain so attractive to many visitors. The tourist without entry into a single household can, by walking the streets, feel privy to an integral part of the national life. Also, this late-night public discourse tends to keep the city safe. Though it is true that there is much talk now—no doubt justified—of increasing crime, it is also true that there is little occasion for violent assault in the club-like atmosphere of many Madrid streets. Who needs a block watch when half the block is already practiced in the evening constitutional? And it is difficult to imagine crime worsening or television improving to such a degree that either would succeed in driving people indoors. There were times when I very much envied my friends, who are fortunate to make their home in such a livable city but who are, commensurate with the current trends, dreaming of one day leaving it for the suburbs.

This nocturnal socializing does not come without a price. V. S. Pritchett wrote that "Madrid must be the only city without loneliness in the world"; similarly, it must be one of the most unbearable for those who cherish solitude. In the cafés at night there seems to be no such thing as a table for one. Allowing, for the moment, that solitude is a perverse Northern aspiration, what, I wondered, of the social agonies of being sick in Spain: bedridden in a nation of table-hoppers! That feeling of life going on without one—rather pleasant in the first days of an illness, but eventually annoying—must reach almost intolerable proportions in Spain. Seriously wondering about the in-patient population, I visited the hospital where Rafa works—the Hospital of the 2nd of October—and found, hardly to my surprise, a lively café situated on the ground floor, with white-shirted waiters, smoke-filled depths, and the requisite piles of refuse on the floor. The only things distinguishing it from a café off, say, the Puerta del Sol, were the appearance of men in bathrobes and the unavailability of hard liquor.

The other unfortunate feature of a devoted life at the bar is, with a few notable exceptions, a deprived life of the mind. Spaniards are not, on the whole, great readers, if you disregard, of course, what is bought at the kiosks. Walking by the Café Comercial on a Saturday night, one finds it difficult to imagine anyone in the city having said in response to a friend's invitation to a drink, "No, thanks, I think I'll stay home and read tonight." A survey of European reading habits, published in a recent issue of the *Economist*, showed that "in Spain a third of the people asked say they never read a book at all." Compare this to Sweden and Holland, where "the average adult gets through nearly seven books a year." This indiffierence to the written word would not be especially objectionable (except to booksellers, not to mention writers) were Spaniards not so politically zealous. Madrileños frequently take to the streets in large numbers (no special insight is necessary to understand the appeal of a street demonstration, for whatever cause, to the Spanish temperament), but one wonders how well-informed their opinions are. The classic travel-guide cliché, "while men in cafés discuss politics," is an apt one. It *is* what they do—in place of reading.

One day I went to visit Sonia's uncle, Juan Pablo Ortega, a writer of modest reputation. He greeted me at the door of his apartment on a side street near the Plaza de Toros: a compact man with puffy jowls and white, neatly parted hair. The small study into which I was led (his being a modern apartment, with low ceilings and close walls) had the look of a bookish bachelor's habitation. A work desk stood in front of a balcony window looking onto the bare walls and tiled roofs of an urban backyard. On the desk were a lamp and some handwritten pages. A gallimaufry of paintings hung on one wall; a life's library of books lined the one opposite. A handful of these Señor Ortega had himself written (the consummate addition to a private collection) only one of which, I regret to say, I had read. This book was a slim volume entitled *Los Americanos en America*, the product of Señor Ortega's two-year sabbatical in the United States. Even though he spent those years teaching Spanish literature at Vassar and Colby colleges, much of the action takes place at the fictional Chichitowa College in Texas. The book consists of short, humorous sketches on various aspects of American life: television, funeral homes, psychoanalysis—predictable but legitimate, not to say tempting, targets for the foreigner. The author's touch is



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light throughout, somewhat reminiscent of George Mikes's in his classic on the English, *How To Be an Alien*. Señor Ortega found the comparison, which I mentioned to him, pleasing. He told me that he has never been able to get a translation of his own book published in America.

He then showed me a letter he had just received from the United States: an invitation to attend the "Sixth International Humor Conference" to be held at Arizona State University. The sponsor of the event was the humorlessly titled "International Advisory Committee on World Humor and Irony." He asked if I knew anything about the group; he was befuddled. Accompanying the invitation was an alphabetical list of countries and their humor representatives: Under *Spain*, Juan Pablo Ortega's name had been scribbled in with question marks. I confessed that the group was unknown to me and suggested that, if he were in need of a subject for another book, he ought definitely to go.

He set out two Schweppes lemon sodas and numerous Belin cracker snacks and asked me if I didn't have trouble understanding him. "Then you do not think it too cheek of me to teach English?" he chuckled. He had done his studies in French literature, and when the emphasis in the schools switched to English, he taught it to himself with laudable industry. He refined it later when he was in Waterville, Maine, and Poughkeepsie, New York. "This New England is a beautiful place," he told me at one point. "You don't talk enough about what wonderful parts there are in America."

Now Señor Ortega is teaching, as he has been for years, at a trade school in Madrid. He spoke fondly of the students who, he said, are teenagers primarily from working-class backgrounds. His literary efforts have not been as well tailored to the market as his pedagogic ones. Although the publication of his most recent novel was celebrated at city hall, with a reception given by the late mayor (a personal friend), Señor Ortega has no regular publisher. His books do not sell well (victims of the aforementioned bonhomie), and, as is common in Spain, with each new one that is written, a new publisher must be sought. The normally difficult situation is exacerbated in Señor Ortega's case because the genre he often works in is humor and, as he told me regretfully, "There is no publishing house in Spain today that has a humor series." He also writes short stories, another form that is little practiced. There is considerable competition to publish in the few journals that exist. He showed me examples of essays and journalism he had done over the years and said that now he would like to write for *El Pais*, but the problem was that everyone else would too. I got the impression that he meant that a greater receptiveness is given to younger writers. Later he said, "We writers are not doing anything especially important now, but there is a lot of activity in the arts and in design." Of his native city's new fashionableness, he said: "Madrid is the most American city in the most African country in Europe." Before I left, he gave me a copy, which I took to be one of the last from a dwindling stock, of *Los Americanos en America*. (I had been unable to find it in any bookstore.) The inscription reads: "To Tom, An American from America."

In most countries, Sundays, like the larger holidays, are often insufferable for tourists: the closed shops, the empty streets, the gathering of families in a place where one does not even have friends. Understandably, this is much less so in Spain. My last Sunday in Madrid I took the subway to the Rastro—the old flea market—and pushed my way through the populated, commercial streets. The market fills a neighborhood, and though its wares are famous for their variety and number, I could barely see a fourth of them for the crowds. I spent my first half hour working my way in, and my last struggling to get out. When I finally left, I got a bus for the Retiro.

The Retiro is Madrid's famous park, a verdant expanse in the center of the city, dotted with lakes and furnished with statues. Here one finds the statue of Galdós, the great chronicler of Madrid, often called "the Spanish Balzac." Though the park has numerous secluded lanes, the great masses can be seen taking their "paseo" in the bright sunlight along the broad promenade, contentedly passing the cafés, the vendors, the crowds—in a word, all the things that one traditionally goes to an urban park to escape from.

For lunch I went to a "Restaurante Chino," as many such establishments seem to be called, primarily for a change of taste but partially for the linguistic relief of being able to order in Spanish from a fellow foreigner. (Strange the kinships travel creates.) There is



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no Chinese neighborhood in Madrid; and Chinese restaurants appear on any commercial street. German restaurants also enjoy popularity, as do, less surprisingly, French ones. But it is always, as in the case of the Chinese, food without a country, or rather, without a neighborhood. Madrid still proves George Borrow right. "The huge population of Madrid," he wrote, "with the exception of a sprinkling of foreigners, chiefly French tailors, glove-makers and peruquiers, is strictly Spanish, though a considerable portion are not natives of the place. Here . . . [is] a population which, however strange and wild, and composed of various elements, is Spanish, and will remain so as long as the city itself shall exist." The French tailors may have been replaced by American businessmen and a few African and Arab students, but the fact remains that on Madrid's streets pass the faces of the nation, not of the world.

In the late afternoon I arrived at the Plaza de Toros where I was to meet Rafa and Jorge for the day's bullfight. They had each agreed to accompany me, making it known that it would be only their second or third attendance ever. Soccer is by far the more popular sport; bullfighting is under some attack. A poster I saw in my walks about the city showed a gouged bull with the words printed boldly in black: "Torture: It Is Neither Art Nor Culture." When I mentioned to Señor Ortega his proximity to the bull ring, he said to me flatly: "I don't go. It is a cruel sport. If it weren't for the tourists, there would be no more bullfights in Spain."

When my companions arrived, we took our places in line for tickets, which are still sold in three categories: sun, sun and shade, shade. Also waiting were a number of tourists—Germans, Americans, and Japanese prominent—but the great majority of fans were grave dark Spanish men in their middle years. We bought three seats in the shade, at 2,100 pesetas, or about sixteen dollars, apiece.

Inside we rented seat cushions and proceeded up some worn stone steps. I was struck by the austere interior of the stadium. Its familiar properties, especially that wondrous harnessing of the outdoors indoors, in this instance nicely complemented by Moorish arches, provoked in me welcome associations with beer vendors and program barkers. Here, however, aside from the cushions, nothing was for sale and nothing was made for comfort.

After climbing to our level, about midway up, we stepped out into the shade and took our seats on the cool stone. The arena—a circus-size ring bisected by the curved projectory of the roof's shadow, with the colorful shirts of the spectators bunched above the spotless dirt of the infield—worked a certain spell on me, though it was difficult to say how much of this was due to the present view and how much to the countless stories and legends accumulated over the years. At exactly five that afternoon, the fight entourage emerged from one of the gates. The three toreros, pinched into their bespangled tights, led a medieval unit of banderilleros and picadores riding horses—one of the latter, a Friar Tuck look-alike, was adorned for jousting. Together they proceeded daintily in our direction and at the wall removed their hats and bowed to the "corrida" president, who sat above us in a beribboned box with his grim cohorts. It was after this part of the bullfight, with its tinny three-man orchestra accompaniment, that Sonia had told me her enjoyment always ended.

When the first bull entered, suspense was added to ceremony, at least for me, and probably for the bull, because for both of us it was our first time there. Never much of a Hemingway fan, I was ignorant of the procedure of a bullfight, but I soon discerned the routine stages that lead to nearly ineluctable death. I was disappointed to discover that, with the haughty spearing of the picadores, and the "peones" who run in and out of their protective stalls with shrinking taunts (schoolboy prankishness exhibited by grown men in feminine attire), there is really very little of torero versus bull, or at least of a healthy bull. The celebrated cape flourishes come when the animal is already riddled with wounds, the picks in his back swaying as he moves, and, morbidly decorated as they are with ribbons, increasingly discolored by blood.

The spectators—the Spanish ones at least—showed an appreciation for the individual style of each torero, crying "¡Olé!" after a well-executed pass and, in one instance, waving white handkerchiefs as a sign to the president that the fighter deserved the dead animal's ear. I, on the other hand, was fascinated by the bull. I watched the death agony of each



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one and its aftermath—the matter-of-fact hitching of the beast to a team of horses, the inglorious dragging of the corpse across the dirt, the ground crew's sprinkling of new soil over the fresh trail of blood, none of which seemed to hold any interest for those around me. Six bulls were slain that day, and with each new bull, knowing already his fate, I appreciated more his power, his verve, his unscarred skin. The entire spectacle appeared as a living anachronism—the image of the Roman Colosseum came to mind—and the only thing I can think of to say in its favor is that it is not fashionable.

# *History*

## Jay Parini

History has many corridors, yes,
and floodlit stages where the folks with
greater parts than we have
romp, cavort, and trade bold gestures
that affect us all,
and sooty alleys where you'd only go
for love or money;
it's a steeply winding stair,
a sliding board, a well, a tunnel or a ramp,
depending on your gravity of mind
or point of view—but all
the same, the level years
like floors that tumble through a burning house
and come to rest, blue cinders,
on the ground where all things subject
to the laws of change must come to rest,
the shelf of now,
this moment over breakfast
when we touch warm fingers over
jam and toast
and say, okay, I'm glad you're here,
no matter what was said or done before,
I'm glad you're here.

JAY PARINI teaches at Middlebury College. His most recent book of poems, *Town Life*, is forthcoming from Henry Holt & Co.



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# *Books*

## F. Scott Fitzgerald's Little Drinking Problem

JULIE M. IRWIN

Hemingway swore that Fitzgerald's downfall was all Zelda's fault. Dos Passos blamed it on Scott's impossible desire to be both a great commercial and artistic success. Fitzgerald himself blamed it on a number of things—declining book sales, a disastrous screenwriting career, Zelda's madness, a continual lack of money. Whatever the reason, by the 1930s no one could deny the direction F. Scott Fitzgerald's career had taken. He had begun as a best-selling novelist at the age of twenty-three and had written a classic American novel, *The Great Gatsby*, before he was thirty. But by Fitzgerald's mid-thirties, all of this had been drastically reversed. The depths that Fitzgerald reached in the latter part of his career were as dramatic as his early successes. At his death in 1940 at the age of forty-four, he was a washed-up author whose books were moldering in Scribner's warehouse, fired from screenwriting jobs in Hollywood, in debt to friends, publishers, and agents, supporting a wife who drifted hopelessly from mental institution to mental institution. Successes and failures, he drank through them all: first there were the drunken sprees that seemed to be a celebration of youth and vitality, later followed by the bitter, abusive drunkenness that many of his friends had come to regard as sheer self-destruction.

The Fitzgerald story is well known by now—perhaps better known than his fiction—and a sort of mystique has sprung up around him. Scott and Zelda have become mythologized in the literary memory; their marriage was a glorious and romantic legend, and they themselves, according to that legend, were somehow too elegant, too sensitive, simply too grand for this world and hence condemned to suffer because of it. This mystique was begun immediately following Fitzgerald's death. One can see it coming to life in the obituaries written about him: James Gray, for example, writing in the *St. Paul Dispatch*, noted that "there is a kind of rightness to the fact that his death came so early. Having had much of both good and bad, he had surely lived enough." *The New Yorker* echoed these sentiments in an editorial published two weeks after his death: "In a way we are glad that he died when he did and that he was spared so many smaller towns, much farther from Geneva," a reference to the last lines of *Tender Is the Night*. The popularity of this legend prompted Cyril Connolly to describe Fitzgerald as

> an American version of the Dying God, an Adonis of letters born with the century, flowering in the twenties, with the Jazz Age which he perfectly expressed and almost created, and then quietly wilting through the thirties to expire—as a deity of spring and summer should—on December 21, 1940, at the winter solstice and the end of an epoch.

The Fitzgerald mystique has grown even grander today. Most of the biographies, personal reminiscences, scrapbooks, and miscellanies written about Fitzgerald attempt, in one way or another, to analyze his downfall. Some of these blame his plight on bad luck, or greed, or love; some make it a poetic irony and imply that his talent was bound up with a sort of "tragic flaw." Fitzgerald's various biographers discuss his drinking—mention of it is unavoidable—but they generally see it as a symptom of his problems rather than a problem in and of itself: he drank because he was depressed, they tell us, or because he was broke, or because Zelda was in the midst of a religious conversion. Other critics and biographers have tied Fitzgerald's drinking to his

JULIE M. IRWIN is a June 1987 graduate of Northwestern University.



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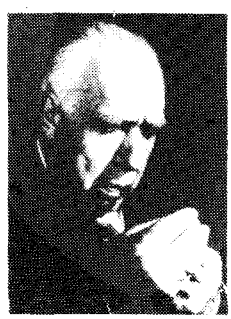

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work as an American author. The theory here is that the artist with his tightly strung temperament, stranded in a culture that is interested in almost everything else except art, suffers immeasurable agony and alienation and tries to escape by drowning his sorrows. This theory does not explain why some writers never experience problems with alcohol; nor does it explain why some mail carriers and insurance salesmen become alcoholics. It does, however, show a powerful lack of understanding about the causes and effects of alcohol abuse.

In the 1920s, with Prohibition the law of the land, dependence on alcohol was considered a vice, a moral weakness, a psychological flaw, while alcohol itself was a sexy, mysterious, splendidly illicit thing. This contradictory view has been somewhat corrected by extensive research over the past half century: the received wisdom now is that consumption of alcohol can in some people lead to alcoholism, which is a disease, yet many of the most serious questions about the disease still want answers. Is alcoholism predominantly a physiological or psychological problem? What roles do genetics, culture, physiology, and personality play in the origin and development of the disease? What are the differences between alcoholics and problem drinkers, between alcoholism and drunkenness? What is the best method for treating alcoholics? While researchers agree on labeling alcoholism a disease, what sort of disease is it? An analogy can be made between alcoholism and hypertension: in both diseases such factors as personality, physiology, personal habits, and cultural influence contribute to the malady, and because certain similarities are present in every case, it is possible to construct a medical model.

Currently the best medical model of alcoholism rests on the progression of three stages most alcoholics go through. The early stage is characterized by relief drinking, growing preoccupation with alcohol, increased tolerance for alcohol, and improved performance while drinking; the middle stage by physical dependence on alcohol, loss of control over drinking, withdrawal symptoms upon abstinence, denial of the problem, and attempts to rationalize it away; and the final stage by malnutrition, decreased tolerance, morning drinking, and estrangement from friends and family, evolving in many instances to the classic Skid Row disaster and ending in death.

Where in the thicket of these complex questions does F. Scott Fitzgerald stand? Was he a drunk or an alcoholic—a man of simple weakness of character or a man with a real disease? Did Fitzgerald drink as he did out of the urgings of immature and ultimately self-destructive behavior, or had he very little choice in the matter, being in fact the victim of a serious disease? How these questions are answered is crucial for F. Scott Fitzgerald's reputation, and, more important, for the reputation of his work. "A poem is great until you know the poet," Karl Kraus once said. For many years now critics have promoted an image of Fitzgerald that, if one thinks about it, has detracted from the reputation of his work; in Fitzgerald's case, it seems that a more intimate understanding of Fitzgerald, and especially of the nature of his drinking problem, serves to deepen one's respect for the work he accomplished.

Several short stories F. Scott Fitzgerald wrote about drinking provide the basis for this more intimate understanding of the man and his work. These stories, written between 1921 and 1939, read like the progressive case history of a classic alcoholic. They reveal symptoms of the disease that, at the time he wrote them, were not even known to be associated with it. The stories chronologically trace the progression of stages that nearly every alcoholic goes through as he moves from the early to the late stages of the disease. They treat the physiological and the psychological problems common to the victims and to the people around them. By using recent research to interpret the stories, one gets an understanding of the disease, and of the disease's effect on Fitzgerald's work, which is much more complete than anything offered by his contemporaries or his critics. At the same time, the stories allow a thorough examination of a typical alcoholic experience—the career of a disease, so to speak—and they dispel many of the myths surrounding the disease. It is important to acknowledge that Fitzgerald's alcoholism was a major influence on his life and his work; indeed, no understanding of Fitzgerald's career is complete unless it considers his alcoholism alongside his marriage, his education, his finances, his snobbery—that is, considers it as a crucial fact of his life.



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The stories in question were written over a twenty-eight-year span. Most of the protagonists, if they do not bear an exact biographical resemblance to Fitzgerald, are characteristically Fitzgeraldian: Ivy League, upper-middle-class, stylish. In the first such story, "The Camel's Back," written in 1921, the hero is a twenty-eight-year-old lawyer named Perry Parkhurst. He is in love with a young woman named Betty Medill, and at the beginning of the story he proposes marriage to her. She refuses his proposal, and he gets drunk after he leaves her house. He then decides to attend a costume party and, still drunk, goes dressed as a camel. Betty is also at the party, but she fails to recognize him in his camel outfit. Thinking he is a man from out of town, she flirts and dances with him all evening. Perry and Betty win prizes for best costumes and participate in a mock marriage ceremony, but when Perry pulls out the marriage license he had previously obtained and the man conducting the ceremony reveals himself to be a preacher, the two realize they are legally wedded. At first Betty is furious, yet by the end of the story her anger has subsided and she pledges to remain married to Perry for the rest of her life.

Upon first reading, we take this rather lightweight story as a humorous if unrealistic account of a drunken episode. It seems to have nothing in common with the behavior we normally associate with anything as serious as alcoholism. After all, Perry is a member in good standing of the upper middle class; the events that happen to him while drunk are all mildly humorous; and everything turns out well in the end. Just how is such behavior dangerous or destructive? The story was written early enough in Fitzgerald's career so that drinking had not yet caused major problems for him, but beneath the comic surface are signals that indicate that Perry is probably in the first stage of alcoholism.

The first symptom is known as relief drinking, or "seeking a mood swing," as Dr. Vernon Johnson, a researcher specializing in alcoholism, has termed it. Dr. Johnson, in a book entitled *I'll Quit Tomorrow*, explains that all human emotion can be placed on a chart that ranges from pain to euphoria, with a normal emotional level, neither happy nor unhappy, falling somewhere in the middle. During a normal drinking episode a person starts out feeling normal, approaches euphoria while drinking, and returns to a normal emotional level after he stops drinking. The early-stage alcoholic, however, is unhappy at the beginning of his drinking episode, realizes that alcohol will improve his mood, and decides that he will drink for this reason. Relief drinking is also occasionally practiced by nonalcoholics, but its frequency is common to nearly all alcoholics during the early stage of their disease. In "The Camel's Back," Perry "seeks the mood swing," and he is successful: the bitterness caused by Betty's rejection is replaced by high spirits from alcohol.

Perry also demonstrates the symptom known as "improved performance": here the alcoholic is able to perform better after he has been drinking. While sober, Perry is a trifle boring, and Betty seems justified in her uncertainty about marrying him. But after he is drunk, Perry is charming, flirtatious, funny. Betty and the other guests, at any rate, are fascinated by him. This trait of improved performance also separates alcoholics from nonalcoholics: the mental and physical behavior of nonalcoholics generally deteriorates after the first few drinks, but alcoholics in this stage are able to think more clearly and move more gracefully long after everyone else, on roughly the same amount of alcohol, is staggering and slurring words.

The benefits that alcohol produces in early-stage alcoholics give no indication that a problem is developing. It would be impossible to convince Perry Parkhurst that he is in the early stage of a disease because his drinking has yet to cause him problems or embarrassment. Indeed, the results of drinking usually make the alcoholic drink more; after all, Perry is even able to win the woman he loves, thanks to the courage and charm alcohol has given him. This reinforcement will eventually prove destructive because, if he continues to drink, his mental and physical abilities will suffer. The "benefits of adaptation" will gradually be replaced by the "penalties of deterioration."

These penalties are first seen in Fitzgerald's fiction in 1929, with the publication of a story entitled "The Rough Crossing." Working under financial pressure to produce more and more, Fitzgerald was increasingly drawing on his own problems as sources for fiction. This story addresses both his prob-



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lems with alcohol and his stormy marriage. The story is also interesting because here it is the wife who is the alcoholic. She is Eva Smith, married to the famous writer Adrian Smith, and they are on an ocean liner headed for France. At first they resolve to stay together and not to drink, but soon they are bored and slip into the bar for a few drinks. Adrian starts flirting with an eighteen-year-old, and Eva goes on a series of binges. Adrian and Eva quarrel violently and almost endlessly, and she flings into the ocean a strand of costly pearls that he has given her. But during a storm at sea they are drawn together again. He ends his flirtation, and she promises to stop drinking. As they disembark, they swear to each other that the trip was just "an incredibly awful nightmare" and that they will stay together from now on and not allow anything like that to ever happen again.

Eva's alcoholism seems to be entering the middle stage of the disease, a stage marked by physical dependence on alcohol, a loss of control over drinking, rationalizations and denials of a problem, and attempts at geographical escape. The Smiths' trip to France seems to be precisely such a geographical escape, a change of location or occupation in the hope that new surroundings will somehow prompt new behavior. Their resolution to stay away from the bar and their statement that they " 'had never wanted to see a cocktail again' after leaving America" reveal their past problems with alcohol. That they do eventually wander into the bar and end up spending most of their time there indicates that they cannot control when, where, or how much they drink.

Eva also rationalizes her drinking. She blames it on Adrian, on the girl Adrian is attracted to, on poor weather, on illness. She continues to drink even when the ship's doctor orders her to stop. She also feels sick when she stops drinking, a sign that she is becoming physically dependent on alcohol. By deciding in the end that she did not behave badly and that she has nothing to be ashamed about, she denies that she in fact has a problem and neatly eliminates the possibility of getting help.

Adrian's behavior is also important in understanding how alcoholics function; for, while he is not himself an alcoholic, he is an example of what clinicians now refer to as a "co-alcoholic." Usually a spouse, the co-alcoholic helps the alcoholic to function economically and socially and assumes the responsibilities that the alcoholic can no longer carry out. The co-alcoholic's behavior is at first designed to deny the existence of the alcoholic's disease and later to keep peace within the family. Adrian encourages Eva's drinking by supplying her with alcohol after the doctor has ordered the crew not to serve her any more; by resolving, at the beginning and at the end of the story, to avoid contact with other people; and by making excuses for the way she behaves while she is drinking. The co-alcoholic helps the alcoholic deny the existence of the disease and therefore hinders the prospect of getting help. The final scene in "The Rough Crossing" shows how Adrian and Eva work together to deny the disease:

> "Adrian, let's never get to know anyone else, but just stay together always—just we two."
>
> He tucked her arm under his and they sat close. "Who do you suppose those Adrian Smiths on the boat were?" he demanded. "It certainly wasn't me."
>
> "Nor me."
>
> "It was two other people," he said, nodding to himself. "There are so many Smiths in the world."

The main character in a later story, "A New Leaf" (1930), is Dick Ragland, the first Fitzgerald character to be described as an alcoholic, albeit an "extraordinarily handsome" one. He meets an old friend, Phil Hoffman, lunching in the Bois de Boulogne with a young woman named Julia Ross. Julia and Dick are immediately attracted to each other. Although Phil is in love with Julia and has come to Paris to see her, Julia stays with Dick after lunch is over, and they make a date for the following week. When he comes to pick her up, however, he is dead drunk. She is repulsed by the Jekyll-and-Hyde transformation that has come over him. She manages to avoid him during the rest of her time in Paris, but when they find themselves on the same ship back to New York and he tells her that he is going on the wagon in a week, she is excited and hopeful. They begin seeing each other regularly, and soon they are contemplating marriage. Julia goes away to see how Dick fares on his own. When she returns, Dick is forced by Phil Hoffman, the man who introduced them, to confess that he has dated one of Julia's friends during her absence. Julia



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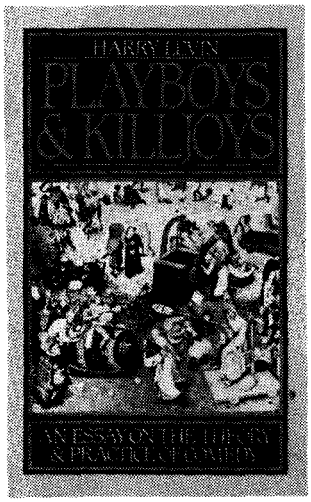


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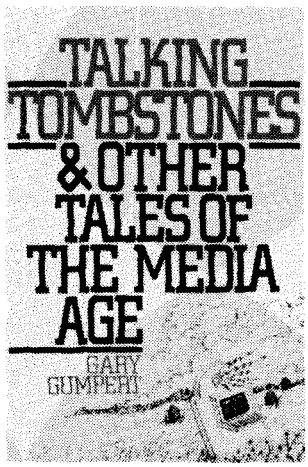


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breaks off the engagement. Dick goes to London to see if he can "change" for her. A few days later Phil tells Julia that Dick has committed suicide by jumping off the side of the ship; he neglects to tell her that Dick had been drinking that night, and indeed somewhat regularly during the previous few months. In the final scene Julia and Phil are married, but she vows that a part of her "will always love Dick."

As the middle-stage alcoholic continues to drink, he is placed in an awkward position. On one hand, he must drink to satisfy his growing addiction; on the other hand, he is aware of his behavior and the reaction of others to it. He must either hide his drinking or find people who know nothing of his reputation. Dick has already driven off most of the people with whom he used to spend time, and he has earned "the worst reputation of any American in Paris." Like the geographical escape used by the Smiths in "The Rough Crossing," Dick attempts a series of moves designed to regain control. At this point most alcoholics feel there is something wrong in their lives, something that is causing them to drink, and if they can only change that one thing they will be able to stop drinking. Some alcoholics move; some change jobs; some get a divorce. Dick first blames his friends but quickly finds that the situation does not improve with a new group. That he is willing to surrender friendships rather than give up alcohol is evidence that he no longer has control over his drinking. His relationship with Julia is another attempt—perhaps, he thinks, love will save him—but this, too, is doomed to failure. He will continue drinking through it all.

Dick also seems to suffer from what is called acute withdrawal syndrome, which afflicted Eva Smith in "The Rough Crossing." In the early stages, this syndrome in alcoholics is similar to a hangover in nonalcoholics. But, as the disease progresses, withdrawal quickly becomes much worse than anything experienced by a nonalcoholic, so much so that many alcoholics feel their "hangovers" should be given a different name, since no normal drinker could possibly recognize them. This severe withdrawal occurs because the cells in the body of the alcoholic are becoming accustomed to the presence of alcohol, and when it is taken away, he becomes, like Dick Ragland, "wan and white," "trembling," "visibly suffering."

The ending of the story illuminates three reactions that are important here: that of the co-alcoholic, that of the bystander, and that of the alcoholic. The first is Julia's reaction. She is full of pity for Dick. She maintains that "he kept his promise" not to drink "and he killed himself doing it . . . he was so brave—he died doing what he said he'd do." This is a co-alcoholic's interpretation of the disease. She allows for his behavior because she believes that fate or bad luck is working against the alcoholic. An alcoholic with a wife or lover like Julia has a lessened chance of recovery because, in addition to his disease, her attitudes must also be "cured." Julia's last words are in defense of Dick: "He broke rather than bent; he was a ruined man, but not a bad man." She is right to dismiss such terms as "good" and "bad," but wrong to blame his problems on "life's cruelty," as she does.

Phil Hoffman's attitude is that of a bystander, be it a good friend, coworker, or acquaintance. He sees Dick's alcoholism as a "weakness," one that "threatened the happiness of the girl he loved." Clearly Phil thinks that Dick chooses to drink: he feels "terribly sorry for him—even understanding how it was necessary for him to turn his maladjustment to life toward one mischief or another." The bystander simply cannot understand why the alcoholic continues to drink. After his initial hope that the alcoholic can "solve" his problem, the bystander is likely to write him off or, as in Phil's opinion of Dick, think that he is better off dead.

Finally, a careful reader of the story needs to note the response of Dick himself. At the beginning of "A New Leaf," Dick's drinking is that of a middle-stage alcoholic. He starts off on the Johnson pain-euphoria scale at a normal or below-normal mood; he still reaches the euphoric side of the scale while drunk, but now he must face the ramifications of his drinking: hangovers, sickness, fights, embarrassing incidents. The alcoholic's mood falls below normal when he sobers up. As his dependency increases, he no longer reaches the euphoric moods; instead he has to drink simply to feel normal. At the same time, the depths of his pain go further and further. Unaware of his dependence, unaware of why he cannot control his drinking, he often be-



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comes convinced that he is "just no damn good." Rationalizations and defenses are needed on a daily basis; guilt and self-hatred increase; personal relationships and then employment are threatened (Phil Hoffman reveals that Dick was about to be fired from his job). Often suicide is contemplated and, in Dick's case, accomplished. Through it all, the alcoholic never fully understands what is really wrong with him.

Fitzgerald's last stories, as one might expect given his condition, examine alcoholics in the final stage of the disease. "The Lost Decade," written in 1939, is a brief story of Louis Trimble, an architect who has "been out of civilization" for ten years. A younger man, Orrison Brown, is assigned by the magazine he works for to show Mr. Trimble around New York and to reacquaint him with the city. Brown is curious about where Trimble has been, and at first from his "measured way" of speaking he guesses that the older man has been in prison or in an insane asylum. Later in their walk, Trimble points to a restaurant he had been in the previous year and remarks about a building, erected ten years before, that he designed. "But I was taken drunk that year—every-which-way drunk," he says, "so I never saw it before now," and he decides that he has no desire to go inside it. Finally the two men part after a handshake, and, as they head in opposite directions, Brown realizes where Trimble has been: "Jesus," he said to himself. "Drunk for ten years."

An alcoholic blackout is defined by Dr. Johnson as "a chemically induced period of amnesia" during which the alcoholic behaves in a normal, unintoxicated manner but later has no recollection of what happened during the period. It is a sign that the brain cells that control the memory are finally being affected by alcohol. While Louis Trimble's story might seem like an exaggeration, blackouts in late-stage alcoholics are no longer as simple as "forgetting" a small period of time.

A counselor at the Johnson Institute tells of a patient who came to him after a four-day blackout. During that time the patient had traveled to Rome and back, but he had no recollection of it: his only proof was the used airline tickets he found in his pocket. He made an appointment to meet with the counselor at a later date, but when the counselor called to verify it, the man did not remember being at the counselor's office. His blackout had been double-layered: he had emerged from the first blackout only to find himself in the midst of another one. As these episodes occur more frequently and for longer periods of time, they cause increasing psychological problems in the alcoholic. After he recovers from a blackout, he is never sure what he did during it, whether he insulted or hurt or killed someone, and often he begins to question his own sanity. The guilt, shame, and self-hatred continue to increase.

The late-stage alcoholic is plagued by physical and psychological problems. Alcohol has caused massive damage to his heart, liver, brain, stomach, lungs, kidneys, and pancreas. It has possibly caused heart failure, liver disease, cancer, malnutrition, and a host of other disorders, one of which will probably kill him. The alcoholic in the last stages must drink constantly, from the moment he wakes up until the time he finally falls asleep or falls unconscious. His tolerance, after increasing and remaining high for a long period of time, now decreases to the point that one or two drinks make him intoxicated. If ethyl alcohol cannot be found, he will drink cough syrup, shaving lotion, rubbing alcohol, anything with alcohol that he can get his hands on. Psychologically he is forced to drop the denial and rationalizations that he has used until now, because he can no longer ignore the reality of his condition. His family has given up on him, either deciding to provide him with a bed and food but no emotional support, or packing their bags and leaving him to fend for himself. He will have lost his job. He is isolated from nearly all human contact. He sometimes experiences spiritual desires, hoping for a miracle to cure him; or he seeks help, usually a brief drying-out period followed by a return to drinking. Suicide is common at this stage. Be it suicide, illness, or accident, by one means or another he stands a good chance of dying soon.

Two Fitzgerald stories from the early 1930s do not specifically address symptoms common to alcoholics, but they do reveal much about Fitzgerald's attitudes toward drinking and the effects he believed his alcoholism to have had on his career and life. "Babylon Revisited," considered by many to be one of Fitzgerald's most masterful stories, concerns an American businessman, Charlie Wales, living in Europe in the early 1930s. He and his wife had been



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"rich Americans" in Paris through the twenties. When the story begins, Mrs. Wales is dead, he has lost his money in the stock market crash, and his sister-in-law, Marion Peters, has custody of his daughter. Charlie Wales is back in Paris to try to regain custody of his daughter, and the changes that have taken place in his life are paralleled by the changes he notices around the city—the empty bar at the Ritz, forlorn doormen at hotels that used to cater to Americans, an unnatural sobriety that has settled over his old haunts. Marion is reluctant to surrender custody of the little girl: she blames Charlie for the death of her sister because he locked her out in the cold one night after a drunken fight, and Marion resents all the years Charlie spent throwing money away while she and her husband were struggling to get by. Charlie demonstrates his sense of responsibility to her, and she is about to surrender custody to him when two friends from his pre-crash days, having found out Marion's address from a bartender at the Ritz, barge into the apartment and create a drunken scene. Marion is shaken by the intrusion and insists that any custody decision be delayed at least six months. Charlie reluctantly leaves the city and thinks of his dead wife; he is "absolutely certain she would have never wanted him to be so alone."

The references in the story to alcohol are minimal. The memories of a few drunken tricycle rides from the old days are mentioned, as well as the fact that Charlie now takes one drink per day so that alcohol does not become too glamorous a thing in his mind. Behind these references is the belief that alcohol has helped ruin his life. His wife has died as a result of his drunken stupidity, and now, even when he has all but stopped drinking, it is preventing him from taking back his daughter. The idea implicit in the story is that once drinking has gotten out of control certain things are lost that cannot be regained, even when one has stopped drinking. The notion of permanent damage caused by alcohol, not only to the body but also to one's relationships with people, becomes a recurrent theme in the later Fitzgerald stories.

The main character of another story, "Family in the Wind," has also had his life changed irreversibly by alcohol abuse. Dr. Janney, once a celebrated surgeon, is now semi-retired because his hands shake so badly, and he owns half interest in a drugstore; his relatives are ashamed of the fall he has taken, and their relationship with him has deteriorated to one of wary politeness. He carries a flask at his hip and stops to drink from it occasionally, and he freely admits that "I am thoroughly anaesthetized the greater part of the day." When a tornado hits his town, the doctor becomes somewhat of a hero, treating the injured and even operating on a few people. He has to duck into the back room every so often to take a few swigs from his flask, but the story ends with him a hero. He even decides to adopt a child who is orphaned by the tornado, and the two of them move off to another town to start over.

Until the tornado, Dr. Janney is an accurate portrait of a late-stage alcoholic. There is no mention of friends or immediate family. He makes no attempt to hide his drinking from others. He has moved past denial and now freely admits his dependence to himself and to everyone else. The break in the story—the transformation from hopeless to heroic—is read by some critics as a self-defense of Fitzgerald's troubled career. This seems reasonable enough; the descriptions Fitzgerald gives of himself in the essay "The Crack-Up" (written in the same year as "Family in the Wind") could easily apply to the doctor.

> In a previous article this writer . . . described himself as a cracked plate, the kind that one wonders whether it is worth preserving. . . .
>
> Sometimes, though, the cracked plate has to be retained in the pantry, has to be kept in service as a household necessity. It can never again be warmed on the stove nor shuffled with the other plates in the dishpan; it will not be brought out for company, but it will do to hold crackers late at night or to go in the icebox under leftovers. . . .

If "Family in the Wind" is a defense of Fitzgerald's troubled career, it is understandable that he would have Dr. Janney try to prove his worth and show that he can still perform if necessary. It ultimately weakens the story, but it reveals how Fitzgerald viewed his alcoholism at the time: as almost hopeless, but not quite completely so.

Although drinking is a serious activity in each of Fitzgerald's four completed novels, in only one of them is a full-blown alcoholic on display: Abe North in *Tender Is the Night.* Published in 1934, three years after "A New



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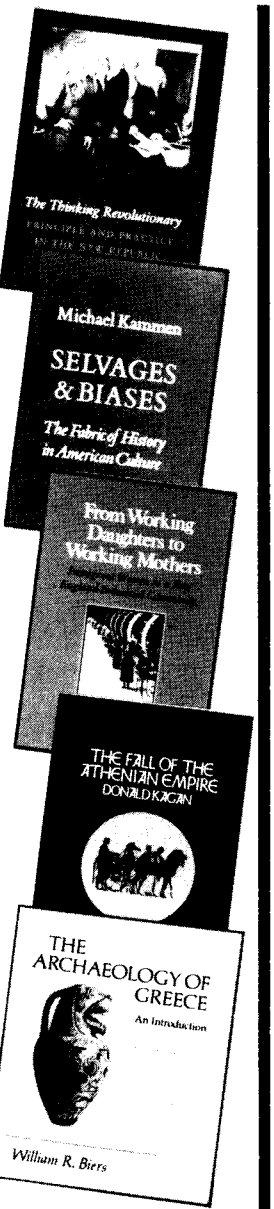


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Leaf" appeared, the novel contains numerous references to drinking throughout, such as Dick Diver's reference to bottles of alcohol as the "poisons of France." It is, however, in Abe North that Fitzgerald creates a character in the final stage of alcoholism. Loosely based on Ring Lardner, North is "a musician who after a brilliant and precocious start had composed nothing for seven years." He is almost always drunk; he stumbles through scenes in a passive haze and is an altogether ineffectual person, quite incapable of making decisions for himself. The two longest passages about North involve efforts to help him in some way. In one scene, several characters arrive at a dock to make sure he boards a ship returning to America, and in the other scene, two of the principal characters try to extricate him from a disagreement that eventually ends in the death of a man. The final mention of Abe in the novel is shortly after he has died, when Dick Diver learns that Abe has been beaten to death in a speakeasy. As Dick recovers from the shock, the other two men at the bar argue over whether Abe crawled to the Harvard Club or the Racquet Club to die.

The physical descriptions of North are jarring: he coughs and retches into his handkerchief; he sweats until his underwear is soaked; and his hands tremble so much that he requires four matches to light a cigarette. Even more striking is that all of the other characters have abandoned all hope in him. They are, to a certain extent, in awe of him—in awe of "his complete lack of inhibitions, his willingness to do anything," in awe of his "survivant will, once a will to live, now become a will to die." At the same time, they realize that his alcoholism has won and that he must be taken care of and looked after if he is to stay alive. When his death is reported in the bar, it is sad but not surprising, for he has been doomed from the start.

One Fitzgerald story is even entitled "An Alcoholic Case." The central character is an unnamed cartoon artist who has a young nurse caring for him full-time. The cartoonist drinks almost constantly: the first paragraph is about his struggle with the nurse over a bottle of gin. She pleads with him, yells at him, bargains with him, and finally gives up and tells him, "All right, drink your fool self to death." He lives alone, in a hotel, and there is only a brief mention of a niece visiting him. Most of all he wants to be left alone to drink himself to death in peace. The nurse, on the other hand, is innocent, eager, and full of hope: she wants to save him from himself.

By the end of the story, she realizes that she can only provide him with a clean bed and warm food and that nothing will stop him from drinking. Once, as she is undressing him as he smokes a cigarette, he pushes the burning end of the cigarette against a copper plate on his left rib. It is an act of defiance; he seems to be telling her not to care, that he does not want to be cured. She notices a change of atmosphere in the room:

> She stared at his handsome face, weak and defiant—afraid to turn even halfway because she knew that death was in that corner where he was looking. She knew death—she had heard it, smelt its unmistakable odor, but she had never seen it before it entered into anyone, and she knew this man saw it in the corner of his bathroom; that it was standing there looking at him while he spit from a feeble cough and rubbed the result into the braid of his trousers.

This depiction of the alcoholic is even bleaker than the one in "Family in the Wind." The cartoonist drinks during all his waking hours. His only human contact is with a paid nurse. He suffers medical and psychological problems as a result of his alcoholism. But, most emphatically, the story stresses that alcoholism is fatal. Once this stage has been reached, physical and psychological recovery is almost impossible. The alcoholic has suffered ailments, indignities, and guilt—and the disease finally wins. The young nurse explains the situation to her supervisor the next day:

> "It's not like anything you can beat—no matter how hard you try. This one could have twisted my wrists until he strained them and that wouldn't matter so much to me. It's just that you can't really help them and it's so discouraging—it's all for nothing."

Reading these sad stories, one cannot for a moment put out of mind the equally sad details of F. Scott Fitzgerald's own gruesome bout with alcoholism. Between the years 1933 and 1937, Fitzgerald was hospitalized eight times for alcoholism and was arrested at least as often. He was ordered by doctors to remain in bed for two and three months at a time, and he experienced chronic heart problems. He



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was drinking as many as thirty-seven bottles of beer a day—his way of tapering off. He lost several screenwriting jobs because directors lost patience with the problems caused by his alcoholism. He began seeing Hollywood gossip columnist Sheilah Graham in 1937; during their three-and-a-half-year relationship, he threatened her life and abused her both verbally and physically. She tried to end their affair in 1939 because of his alcoholism and abuse. In a letter just before their reconciliation, he wrote, "I want to die, Sheilah, and in my own way." Just over a year later, on December 21, 1940, he died in Graham's apartment of a coronary occlusion at the age of forty-four.

If, as seems incontestable, F. Scott Fitzgerald was an alcoholic and not merely a drunk, what exactly does acceptance of this fact mean for his life, his work, and his literary reputation? We know that alcoholism made Fitzgerald's days hellish and clearly brought about his early death. Yet one mustn't push this too far. Certainly Fitzgerald's alcoholism cannot—ought not—be pressed into service to shoulder all the blame for his downfall. Other people, after all, have learned to live with alcoholism, even if they have not completely recovered from it. Until some of the basic questions about alcoholism are answered, one cannot know for sure whether, in Fitzgerald's case, the disease was solely to blame or whether it was a combination of the disease and his own weakness of character that brought him down.

Yet, given that Fitzgerald worked with this considerable handicap, his literary productivity becomes all the more impressive. His abortive struggle in his last months to finish *The Last Tycoon,* which was also his last hope as a novelist, seems almost heroic, and at the same time enormously sad. Knowing that Fitzgerald worked under the pressures of alcoholism makes him seem not an elegant wastrel, another bad boy of American literature, but a literary craftsman devoted to producing art regardless of the obstacles that stood in his way. This, finally, is the lesson to be learned from Fitzgerald's alcoholism: he was a writer who was also the victim of a disease, not a self-destructive drunk bent on wasting the talent he was given.

"Then I was drunk for many years," wrote Fitzgerald in one of his journal entries, "and then I died." It is obvious from reading these stories that he did more than this; and it is just as obvious that, until we understand the pressures put upon him by his alcoholism, we cannot really understand the truly impressive nature of F. Scott Fitzgerald's artistic achievement.

## Banquet Years

THE AWAKENING TWENTIES: A MEMOIR-HISTORY OF A LITERARY PERIOD. *By Gorham Munson. Louisiana State University Press. $19.95.*

Reviewed by DOUGLAS CLAYTON

The familiar tale of American literary culture during the 1920s—its disillusion and skepticism, its episodes of bohemianism and expatriation, and its atmosphere of excess and gaiety—was almost instantaneously committed to print by the youthful novelists and poets who were, at the same time, its principal actors and most obsessive memorialists. "You are all a lost generation," Gertrude Stein is supposed to have said to Ernest Hemingway, and, in one way or another, Hemingway and many of his contemporaries seized upon their complex and fascinating "lostness" with an intensity born of both a genuine self-knowledge and a canny instinct for literary success. As a result, they created not only an impressive body of literature, but also an enduring image of themselves and the 1920s that subsequent generations of critics and biographers have for the most part been willing to modify, but not seriously to question.

One of the main features of this collective self-portrait is the notion that the most characteristic literature of the period reflected a dramatic renunciation of the goals and predilections of the literary radicals who became prominent during the preceding decade. A number of young literary journalists of the 1920s, such as Edmund Wilson and Harold Stearns, were especially fond of distinguishing between the ethical, reformist tendencies of the pre-war radicals and the more disillusioned dispositions of young writers in the

DOUGLAS CLAYTON is a graduate student at Northwestern University.



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twenties. Malcolm Cowley expressed this popular distinction between the two decades quite memorably when, after writing about his generation in newspapers and journals for more than a decade, he produced in 1934 its most celebrated memoir, *Exile's Return*. "'They,'" Cowley wrote of the literary radicals of the pre-war years, "had been rebels: they wanted to change the world, be leaders in the fight for justice and art, help to create a society in which individuals could express themselves." His own generation, on the other hand, "had lost [its] ideals at a very early age, and painlessly. If any of them survived the war, they had disappeared in the midst of bickerings at Versailles, or later with the steel strike, the Palmer Raids, the Centralia massacre."

The critic and essayist Gorham Munson was a charter member of this youthful literary generation, as well as a prominent voice in its self-conscious effort to establish an identity apart from that of the great majority of radicals of the preceding decade. Born in Amityville, New York, in 1896 (the same year as F. Scott Fitzgerald and John Dos Passos), Munson came of age in the midst of the literary excitement and innovation that swept through Greenwich Village in the years just subsequent to the armistice of 1918. After several years of writing essays and reviews for various fledgling journals and experimental little magazines in New York, Munson joined the expatriate ranks and sailed for Paris in July of 1921. Six months after his arrival, he decided to publish and edit his own avant-garde journal of the arts, *Secession*—a decision that was prompted in large part by an article Cowley had published several months earlier, entitled (appropriately enough) "This Youngest Generation." Munson writes in his posthumously published chronicle of the twenties that Cowley's "article discussed certain writers under twenty-five . . . and remarked their divergence in aim and temper from their elders. . . . It seemed to me that it would be a good thing to concentrate the new impulses in a single review—a *tendenz* review, in short."

And, indeed, *Secession* did publish many of the most aggressively youthful writers of the twenties, including Cowley, Kenneth Burke, E. E. Cummings, Matthew Josephson, and Hart Crane. In several issues Munson also printed some of his own highly polemical editorials, in which he announced his primary devotion to "the unknown pathbreaking artist" and criticized more wide-ranging, tolerant competitors like *Poetry* and *The Little Review;* in one particularly vituperative piece, he "exposed" *The Dial* for "its aimless catholicity, its ludicrous choice of Sherwood Anderson for its annual award, and its vulgarization." To these pointed attacks on other journals, writers, and literary movements, Munson often added the type of formalist-aestheticist proclamation the younger writers were fond of delivering at the time. "*Secession,*" he wrote in the first issue, "exists for those writers who are preoccupied with researches for new forms."

However, a closer look at Munson's writings and activities during the early 1920s reveals the lineaments of a more complex and problematic figure. In the first place, Munson was never entirely satisfied with the rigidly formalist orientation that was a conspicuous part of *Secession*'s thoroughly contemporary editorial policy. Instead, he found himself in 1922–23 drawn to the possibility that a fresh, modern literature might contribute to the creation of a new social and cultural order. In spite of *Secession*'s militantly aestheticist posture, therefore, Munson remained interested at this time in the writings and opinions of a number of the most daring cultural radicals from the preceding decade, who consistently emphasized the interrelations between new literary developments and unprecedented forms of social organization.

Of these slightly older figures, Munson was especially sympathetic to Waldo Frank, who had been one of the founding editors of that quintessentially hopeful journal of the pre-war years, *The Seven Arts,* and whose ecstatic invocation of a native American cultural and social risorgimento proved odious to many of the most modern—and determinedly disillusioned—young writers. Munson's co-editor at *Secession,* the American Dadaist Matthew Josephson, felt that Frank was an anachronism whose millennial visions were hopelessly at odds with the harsh, vivid absurdities of modern urban life. But, for Munson, whose first book (published in 1923) was a rather inflexible defense of Frank's work through the early 1920s, Waldo Frank was a leader in "the vast struggle to put positive and glowing spiritual content into Machinery." With such dis-



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agreements between them, it is not at all surprising that by the end of 1923 Munson and Josephson had fallen out in a decidedly messy fashion (at one point the two actually resorted to a hilariously inept bout of fisticuffs). *Secession*, the embattled child of their contradictory enthusiasms, made its final appearance in April of 1924.

By the late 1920s Munson had moved even further from the insouciant absurdities of Dadaists like Josephson and Cowley, as well as from the fashionable disenchantment popularized by "lost generation" novelists, such as Hemingway and Fitzgerald. In Munson's critical study of Robert Frost published in 1927, for example, he praised Frost for his effort "to dissociate himself from the new wave of American writers. He [takes] a stand against their tendencies and revolts." What Munson most admired about Frost was the "classical air" of his poetry—his undiverted interest in common experience, his resilient faith in human fellowship and community, his evident respect (in life as in literature) for order, restraint, and proportion. The following year Munson published *Destinations*, a collection of essays in which he criticized several of the young writers for their willful—and finally insubstantial—subjectivity, and proposed instead a more "objective" literature "stirred by large and true *facts*." The conservative implications of this attack on subjectivist literature, as well as of his admiration for Frost's sensible "classicism," became thoroughly evident in 1930 when he published *The Dilemma of the Liberated*, a systematic critique of the rebellious young literati that also included lengthy chapters in praise of such New Humanists as Irving Babbitt and Paul Elmer More.

Quite a bit of this general pattern of Munson's early career is discernible behind the events and writings he discusses in this memoir-history of the period, *The Awakening Twenties*. Munson had completed a draft of the book shortly before he died in 1969; the editing and shortening of that draft into the present volume was overseen by the author's widow, Elizabeth Delza. However, even though the book does show signs of incompletion (including abrupt transitions between vaguely related chapters and a rather unfinished overall shape), it succeeds both in offering a generous supply of memorable anecdotes and portraits and in revising the impressions left by earlier memoirists about the

Quirks and quarks, Duke Ellington and J. Robert Oppenheimer, Harvard's cyclotron and "Annie of Corsica," all figure in Jeremy Bernstein's delightful memoir of his beginnings as a physicist at the dawning of the atomic age.

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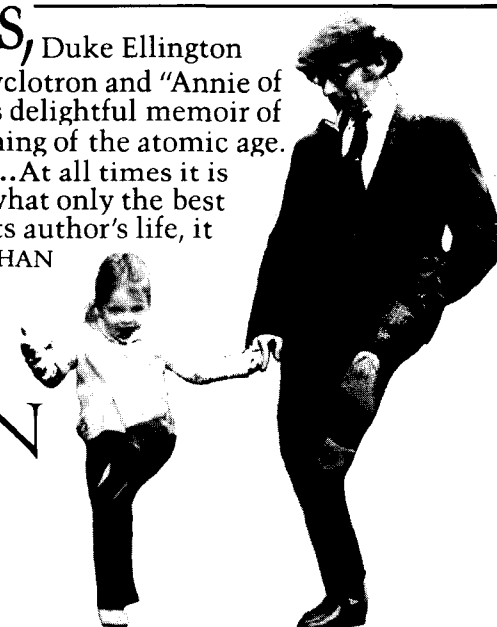

JEREMY BERNSTEIN
THE LIFE IT BRINGS
ONE PHYSICIST'S BEGINNINGS

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literary character and significance of the 1920s. At the heart of this revisionary effort lies Munson's conviction that the twenties represented, not primarily a disillusioned turning away from the hope and fervor of the preceding decade, but rather a "second 'Golden Day' in the enhancement of our national culture," arising out of a particular current of the youthful innovation and promise of that earlier period.

Munson creates his portrait of that particular current of intellectual and literary activity during the pre-war years by concentrating on those persons and journals that were unabashedly devoted to literary innovation and social renewal. A large part of his attention, therefore, is directed toward magazines of experimental verse (such as Alfred Kreymborg's *Others*, whose contributors included Wallace Stevens, Marianne Moore, and Ezra Pound) and of adamant urban modernism (such as Robert J. Coady's *Soil*). Likewise, Munson devotes entire chapters to Alfred Stieglitz, the pathbreaking photographer who was, throughout the decade, a cherished source of creative energy and new ideas, and to Randolph Bourne, that most exuberant of hymnists to youthful potential and creativity.

From here Munson turns to his evocation of the "awakening" 1920s, which includes discussions not only of *Secession* and the insistently forward-looking Frank, but also of such affirmative poetic experimenters as Hart Crane and William Carlos Williams. Munson also provides numerous vignettes of the stimulating magazines that grew up during the decade, as well as of the daring young book publishers—among them Alfred A. Knopf, Horace Liveright, and Ben W. Huebsch—who sought to bring the new literature to a sympathetic new readership. In Munson's portrayal of the twenties, there is little evidence of the despair and disenchantment, or of the anarchic carelessness and destructive self-absorption, that such earlier memoirists as Cowley emphasized in their accounts of the decade. Instead, Munson describes a broad current of literary activity whose spirited search for new cultural and social forms was closely associated with the optimistic visions of earlier radicals, such as Stieglitz, Frank, and Bourne.

It must be admitted, though, that Munson's view of the two decades as a unified literary period obscures, at times, some of the very real conflicts that existed both between the decades and within each one individually. It is worth noting, for example, that he has very little to say about those more contradictory figures of the pre-war years (emphasized by other historians, such as Henry F. May in *The End of American Innocence*) who mixed rebellious proclamations with subterranean yearnings for the forms and consolations of earlier cultural periods. For this reason Munson directs scant attention toward such figures as Van Wyck Brooks, whose call for a vital, modern American literature was complicated (and, some would say, vitiated) by his fondness for the English literature and criticism of the Victorian age. Moreover, Munson devotes practically no attention to the effect of World War I, which so many of his contemporaries regarded as an irrevocable boundary between the cultural movements of the two decades; Munson tends to see it (from the strictly cultural standpoint) as a temporary interregnum.

Munson's avoidance of these problems reveals a rather strained determination to see the period as one of experiment and awakening, and a corresponding unwillingness to see it as a time of unsettling moral challenge and tragic conflict. Almost equally unfortunate is Munson's unalloyed humorlessness throughout. Such painful earnestness, one suspects, leads him at times to belabor and justify episodes (such as his own involvement with the mystical fellowship of G. I. Gurdjieff) that might more reasonably have been attributed to the intemperate excesses of youthful enthusiasm. What the book generally lacks, in fact, is the willingness to laugh at one's youthful foibles, a device Cowley used to notable effect in *Exile's Return*.

In spite of these flaws, though, *The Awakening Twenties* remains valuable for its vigorous attempt to reimagine a literary period whose outline and character, it has sometimes seemed, have been prematurely carved in stone. Earlier memoirists, such as Cowley, have generally presented the 1920s as a period thoroughly insulated from the pre-war faith in an American cultural renaissance in which (as James Oppenheim phrased it in a *Seven Arts* editorial) modern art was to become "not only the expression of the national life but a means to its enhancement." Munson's book, however, indicates that for many important writers of the twenties, this earlier



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faith was only the first expression of a larger cultural period in which they, too, were significant figures. Gorham Munson, until now almost lost to history, counted himself amongst this lively and hopeful company.

## The Big H

GLIMPSES OF THE HARVARD PAST. *By Bernard Bailyn, Donald Fleming, Oscar Handlin, and Stephan Thernstrom. Harvard University Press. $15.*

Reviewed by JOHN WAUCK

Asked to name several American colleges, a European will usually come up with at least two. For some reason, the second choice is more frequently Princeton than Yale or Columbia or Stanford; the first choice is invariably Harvard. Few are as preoccupied with this phenomenon, the international prestige of Harvard University, its validity, essence, and origin, than the faculty and alumni of Harvard itself. This past year, Harvard's 350th anniversary, the University Press indulged itself by publishing *Glimpses of the Harvard Past*, a retrospective look at the university, written by the foremost professors of American history at Harvard.

Despite its quaint title, *Glimpses of the Harvard Past* is not a collection of colorful portraits and reminiscences for doting alumni. It is, for the most part, a sober account of Harvard's administrative history; it is a dry book. The essays that comprise the slim volume were originally lectures delivered by professors Bailyn, Fleming, Handlin, and Thernstrom in 1970–71 for a special course on the history of Harvard. Written on the professorial heights, the book provides a bird's-eye view of Harvard and its past; it focuses on governing bodies, curricula, discipline, and the expansion of the college to its present vast complexity, not on the personal history of administrators—much less of students. Because Harvard is the nation's oldest college (in fact, America's oldest non-governmental institution), *Glimpses* is also an oblique discussion of the history of higher education in the United States. Nevertheless, it is written chiefly for those with a vested interest, those who hope to understand themselves by understanding the university that shaped them.

Today, Harvard prides itself on its "diversity," and the boast is easy to justify. Even architecturally, Harvard is impossible to define. The masters of Adams House live in the home where General John Burgoyne was held prisoner in the American Revolution, just a stone's throw from Le Corbusier's avant-garde Fine Arts building. The university's Georgian-style houses and offices are scattered throughout Cambridge; as an institution, Harvard provides no physical focus for loyalty beyond the narrow streets, dusty bookstores, and perennial hippies of Cambridge, Massachusetts.

The lack of physical definition is echoed in the college's spiritual diversity. In 1910, the journalist John Reed observed, "All sorts of strange characters of every race and mind, poets, philosophers, cranks of every twist were in your class. . . . No matter what you were or what you did—at Harvard you could find your kind." The same is true today—to the point where that administrative buzzword *diversity* has become a joke. The most grotesque aberrations of thought and behavior are now met with a shrug and a weary smile that says, sometimes aloud, "Ah, diversity!" Attending Harvard is rather like growing up in a circus—everyone around seems to have some secret talent (perhaps your lab partner is a waterskiing champion), an exotic foreign background, or extraordinary intellectual gifts. And not just the students: the cook in your club may be Bertrand Russell's daughter and a published author herself.

Today's Harvard is a college for precocious high-school students—perhaps the safest generalization to be made about the student body. The only way that the fifteen hundred freshmen can distinguish themselves from the other eleven thousand applicants is by being peculiar in one way or another; everyone who applies can do the work. Of course, the admissions board gambles on the students it accepts, for some are simply precocious; after peaking prematurely in high school, they will soon be average students once again. Others, especially students from the best prep schools, are not really precocious at all; they are simply over-educated for their age. Be-

JOHN WAUCK, a recent graduate of Harvard University, works as an editor and translator in New York.



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cause these students, intelligent but not brilliant, are often wealthy, they play an important part in the life of every class, shaping the tastes, dress, and social life of Harvard. In a sense, they have already been to Harvard in high school; they are the best prepared and most cohesive group in any class. Finally, there are the genuinely gifted students. It must be said that Harvard does not produce brilliance; it offers a range of experience and food for thought, but it instills no intellectual virtues. The truly comprehensive and original minds at Harvard arrived that way—or made themselves so on their own, for Cambridge does provide the resources.

The most important resource is an abundance of precocious classmates. Precocity, no matter how superficial, is no obstacle to the transfer of knowledge; even the fools at Harvard tend to be articulate and well read. The high concentration of intelligent young people, drawn by Harvard's reputation, allows for learning by osmosis. It does not matter that the reputation is grossly inflated; having drawn the best students from around the nation, the mythic excellence of Harvard becomes almost true. Then there are the books. Cotton Mather, were he to visit Harvard in 1986, would probably be dismayed at what he saw, but he would surely recognize Cambridge by the epithet he coined for it—*Kirjath-Sepher*, the City of Books. There may be more books per capita in Cambridge than anywhere else in the world. Last come the professors, themselves drawn by Harvard's name and the wealth of its research facilities. Many of the professors are brilliant scholars, and some are good teachers. The actual classes and teaching at Harvard are not much better than at most colleges; there is certainly no appreciable difference between Harvard and the other top one hundred colleges in the country. The Harvard administration realizes that classes play a relatively small part in a "Harvard education," hence the month-long hiatus between the end of classes and the beginning of examinations, expressly designed to allow students to busy themselves with extracurriculars during the term, postponing the demands of course work. In the dining halls, at the *Crimson*, in the Hasty Pudding theatricals, in the Lampoon Castle, at the Signet Society, the students receive their "Harvard education" and the inevitable dose of pseudosophistication. Outside of the classroom, too, professors often become better teachers.

Harvard's diversity has one other consequence: it cultivates a spirit of jaded indifference to the spectacle of people and events. Having grown up in the circus, the Harvard student refuses to be impressed or surprised by anything. Not that he could do better; it's just that he's seen every trick before. Combined with a manner assimilated from wealthy classmates, this indifference often passes for snobbery, but it is usually simple ignorance: an inability to recognize what is distinctive and important. This approach to people and ideas ensures a bland, unbiased tolerance, but it guarantees no wisdom; it produces intellectuals rather than intelligent men and women.

In his two essays, "Making Men of the Boys" and "A Small Community," Oscar Handlin argues that the internationally renowned and internally diverse Harvard of the twentieth century is a product of the last half of the nineteenth century. Until the Civil War, Harvard was, in the words of George Santayana, "a seminary and academy for the inner circle of Bostonians." And as for international renown, Alexis de Tocqueville, writing in the 1830s, refers not to Harvard but simply to "the university in Cambridge." Whether Harvard was meant to be a seminary for Puritan divines has been debated since the seventeenth century. Cotton Mather, class of 1678, insisted that Harvard was founded as a "happy seminary." But President Urian Oakes had already told the class of 1677 that they were "*liberi liberaliter educati*"—"gentlemen educated like gentlemen," a remark that historian Samuel Eliot Morison pointed to as evidence that Harvard was ever the home of tolerance and liberal education. Although Harvard's Puritan past (and its early mottos, *in Christi Gloriam* and *Christo et ecclesiae*, prior to the current nonsectarian *Veritas*) is the source of much easy irony when contrasted with its secular present, the fact remains that only 50 percent of the graduates in the seventeenth century became ministers—rather a low percentage for a "happy seminary." Bailyn provides a wise resolution to the controversy in noting that, in Puritan times, there was no distinction between religious knowledge and secular knowledge—whether one was a minister or a magistrate, one was educated for the service of the Lord.



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Handlin contends that in its first two centuries of existence Harvard was a place where young men could obtain some learning in a pious atmosphere before embarking on a career. In those years, students entered the college at the age of fifteen; in Handlin's words, "The business of the institution was discipline." Every night, the university president patrolled the Yard with his lantern. Harvard then was like a prep school, which rather undermines Bailyn's assertion that student violence was a constant feature in Harvard's history. Lecturing in 1970–71, on the heels of the sixties, Bailyn was doubtless at pains to find precedents for the terrible violence of the preceding years, but the examples he offers only highlight the differences; they are clearly adolescent pranks and food fights, though these fights could get ugly: the famous historian William Prescott was blinded in one eye when hit by a particularly hard piece of crust in the early 1800s.

At that time, Harvard was extremely provincial as well. In his chapter on the changing demography of Harvard, Stephan Thernstrom notes that, while Yale and Princeton attracted many students from the Midwest and the South respectively, Harvard was populated almost exclusively by Boston and a few other large New England cities. But one reason for this provincial homogeneity soon became a source of Harvard's diversity, for while the rest of the nation experienced the Second Great Awakening—the outburst of evangelical zeal that convulsed the early nineteenth century—Harvard went Unitarian; it embraced a radical tolerance. In 1831, nearly one quarter of the instructors and administrators at Harvard were Roman Catholics. Parents concerned for their sons' souls sent them to the safely orthodox Yale or Dartmouth, where twice as many graduates as at Harvard became ministers. When the religious revival cooled, Harvard—the first college to abandon compulsory chapel—offered a liberalism that attracted students throughout the country. As Donald Fleming puts it, under President Eliot, who began his tenure in 1869, even "God had become an elective at Harvard."

Charles W. Eliot's time as president of Harvard was the turning point in the university's history. To call it a point is an understatement,

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for Eliot reigned from 1869 to 1909; he guided Harvard into the modern world. His chief reform was the institution of the elective system, which freed many professors from teaching duties, allowing them time for research, and also provided students with a strong hand in shaping their own education. During Eliot's years, the spirit of the German universities invaded American academia. No longer the private preserve of privileged youths in need of a gentlemanly education, the university was the realm of the professional scholar.

For a brief period, the two ideals—of liberal education and professional scholarship—coexisted. This was Harvard's "Golden Age." Donald Fleming paints an imaginative picture of life at Harvard during those first years of the twentieth century, when one's classmates would have included T. S. Eliot, Samuel Eliot Morison, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, John Reed, Walter Lippmann, and Van Wyck Brooks. Among the professors would be William James, George Lyman Kittredge, Irving Babbitt, and George Santayana. Fleming's essay provides the anecdotes that the book's title seems to promise: the day George Lyman Kittredge, with all his ego and wit, tumbled from the dais and remarked, "At last, I find myself on the level of my audience"; Irving Babbitt teaching French, which he calls "a cheap and nasty substitute for Latin." It is appropriate that Fleming handles the anecdotes, for he is himself one of Harvard's great characters. (Asked once where he, a native of Massachusetts, had developed his unearthly, quavering manner of speech, Fleming is said to have warbled in reply, "Pure affectation.") The professors of the "Golden Age" were not simply expounding upon their fields of expertise, they were selling philosophies of life and trying to shape the young men they faced. George Santayana called his colleagues "clergymen without churches." William James, Josiah Royce, Irving Babbitt, and Santayana himself were in open competition to win disciples. President Eliot contributed to the ascetic air of these secular clergymen by paying them tiny salaries. He believed that the college professor's vocation demanded an altruistic conception of life and duty.

The "Golden Age" did not last long. The scientific German approach to academia and what William James called "the Ph.D. octopus" stifled the style of teaching that had made the golden years possible. "Science," as applied to literature and philosophy, seemed to mean logic and philology, a denial of the human bearings of ideas and art. For similar reasons, Irving Babbitt protested the dogma that a professor must have a Ph.D.

> But one may shine as a productive scholar, and yet have little or nothing of that humane insight and reflection that can alone give meaning to all subjects, and is especially appropriate in a college teacher. The work that leads to a doctor's degree is a constant temptation to sacrifice one's growth as a man to one's growth as a specialist. We must be men before being entomologists.

Babbitt wanted to see professors chosen for their "wide reading in great books and the power to relate these to life." Nothing could be further from the German ideal of academic specialization. It is heartening, in this context, to note the perennial popularity of the combined History and Literature major at Harvard, the last vestige of the golden years and evidence that Babbitt's ideal still strikes a chord in some undergraduate hearts.

Babbitt was not the only one to protest the direction in which Harvard was drifting. It became clear that the ultimate consequence of the freedom of the purely elective system was an abdication of Harvard's responsibility to give a thorough liberal education to undergraduates. "Education cannot be discussed in a void," wrote T. S. Eliot. "To know what we want in education we must know what we want in general; we must derive our theory of education from our philosophy of life." But an integrated "philosophy of life" is the one thing that Harvard, in its diversity, can never have. So undergraduate education became the haphazard affair it still is, and serious studies were left for graduate school.

*Glimpses of the Harvard Past* is not an advertisement for Harvard, but neither does it offer much serious criticism—at least not openly. The authors still teach at Harvard; one can hardly expect them to air their complaints on the occasion of Harvard's 350th anniversary celebration. Yet some criticisms do surface. Stephan Thernstrom relates how Harvard tried to exclude Jews in the 1920s and 1930s. In the supposed interest of "diversity," Harvard decided it needed more students from rural areas. The victims of this shift



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in emphasis were not the students from prep schools in New England but those from big-city public schools, where the majority of Jews were educated. The result—fully expected and intended—was a huge drop in Jewish enrollment. But Harvard's anti-Semitism is safely past, and Thernstrom does not touch more sensitive issues that are still embarrassing today, such as the position of black students at Harvard. While there is no open hostility between blacks and whites, it cannot be claimed that the blacks have been effectively assimilated into the life of Harvard. The majority of black students live in one or two of Harvard's thirteen houses. Interracial contact is only widespread and constant in sports and the arts, which is encouraging, but Harvard has a long way to go on this front.

The most serious criticisms come from Donald Fleming. In recounting the adverse reactions to Eliot's elective system, Fleming mounts a thinly veiled attack on the Harvard of today, for the character of the university has not changed greatly since Eliot ushered in the "age of diversity" and specialized scholarship. The current Core program, which requires students to distribute their electives over a broad range of subject areas, is not a solution. For example, a student may fulfill his Core history requirement by taking one course on the Thirty Years' War and another on American immigrants. One recent Harvard graduate complained bitterly of his "dilettantish" course of studies that prepared him for neither a career nor life in general. Education for a career means graduate school, and education for life was abandoned with the advent of electives and professionalitis.

It would be tempting but foolish to see such acknowledgment of faults and insufficiencies as a sign of modesty, for no form of Harvard snobbery is more distinctive than the recklessness with which it criticizes itself. What other college would require incoming freshmen to read such books as *The Education of Henry Adams* and *The Quiet American*—books whose only sure effect is to call into question the value of the Harvard education they are about to receive. Far from humbling, the message is this: not only is our college the best, but we are also our own best critics, and even our defects set us apart. It is a sign of Harvard's complacency that, although Oscar Handlin's introduction promises that *Glimpses of the Harvard Past* will clarify the possibilities for Harvard's future, no changes appear to be envisioned.

## Wise Guy

ALEXANDER POPE: A LIFE. *By Maynard Mack. Norton. $22.50.*

Reviewed by LAWRENCE LIPKING

Pope does not bring out the best in people. Probably no other English poet ever did more good deeds, was such a devoted friend, tried so hard to be pleasing, and has been hated so much. The malice was there from the start. "There is nothing so stupid and impotent as a hunch-back'd Toad," wrote John Dennis, one of the best critics of the time, greeting the twenty-two-year-old author of *An Essay on Criticism*. (More than twenty years later, when Dennis had fallen on hard times, Pope assisted him with influence and money.) One might expect spite from an enemy. But not even friends could be trusted to stay on Pope's side. After his death, Lord Bolingbroke, a man he had worshiped as "something superior to anything I have seen in human nature," accused him of treachery (Pope had secretly printed one of Bolingbroke's books). The pattern continues today. A good many readers do not like Pope, and some of them—though not many poets—doubt he is a poet at all. Too clever for comfort, his verse shines in the eyes of his enemies like a flashlight, making them feel thick-witted and abused. Yet some of the blame for misperceptions of Pope should be assigned to his friends. There is something wrong with his public image—something twisted about it.

The problem began with the poet's poor contorted body, four-and-a-half-feet high and racked by tuberculosis of the bone. In an enlightened age, observers might like to think themselves above noticing such things. But in fact both friends and enemies return obsessively to Pope's figure, torturing it into an emblem of thought. "Around a crooked tree /

LAWRENCE LIPKING is the author of *The Life of the Poet: Beginning and Ending Poetic Careers* and *The Ordering of the Arts in Eighteenth-Century England.*



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A moral climbs whose name should be a wreath." When young Allen Tate wrote his tribute to "Mr. Pope," he obviously identified with the tiny, outraged, honest, defiant hero—an honorary Agrarian taking his stand—and wanted to shield him from the vulgar stares of people who confuse a poet with his work. Yet the images of the crooked tree and snakelike ivy carry a sinister implication, as if Pope's body were the outward sign of invisible original sin. Tate places his wreath so as to make us notice what it covers. Many other defenders of the poet have been similarly hypnotized by his aura of the prodigy or freak. Pope requires protection from such friends.

Maynard Mack has taken on himself the business of protection. His is a most indulgent biography, faithful to its subject, devoted to his poetry, and ready to understand and forgive all, or almost all. It will also be the standard life of Pope for a long time to come. Mack has mastered the work of many specialists and painted a clear and comprehensive picture of the times as well as the man. No modern biography of Pope rivals this one in the scope of its learning or its grasp of the circles in which the poet moved. Now we can see him as his friends might have seen him—if only Pope's friends had stayed as loyal as Professor Mack. Why then have reviewers tended to be so grudging? Perhaps some of them side with Pope's detractors and would prefer a less generous, indulgent book, one that gave equal space to his faults as a poet or person. But some of Pope's friends have also been uneasy about the sheer high-mindedness of Mack's majestic biography. It is a book that suffers, I think, from a very unusual weakness: an overabundance of wisdom.

Since not too many current books can be accused of being wise, the fault may be worth exploring. What does wisdom mean today in practice? First of all, a stock of familiar quotations. Wisdom, when put in words, consists of proverbs and aphorisms and unforgettable, all-purpose phrases that remind us we have come this way before and will again. "*True Wit* is *Nature* to Advantage drest, / What oft was *Thought*, but ne'er so well *Exprest*" (though a little learning is a dangerous thing and fools rush in where angels fear to tread). No matter how gloomy, the words are comforting to recognize and repeat; they affirm the continuities of human life. In this sense Mack qualifies as an exceptionally wise author. Everything that happens calls to mind some literary allusion, a few lines of Shakespeare or Dylan Thomas. But the habit involves a cost. Consider, for instance, the opening sentence of the book: "It was the best of times and it was the worst of times." This is a very wise thought and doubtless true, whatever times might be referred to. Most readers will identify the source without effort, and many will be pleased with themselves for noting that "and" (an early sign of garrulity) is Mack's addition. Yet a book takes a while to recover from such a beginning. Aside from the triteness of the thought, its import seems mystifying. In what sense could 1688, the year that James II fled for his life, be viewed as the best of times for an English Catholic? The answer arrives in the following chapter: London was a wonderful place to grow up or, as the book predictably states it, "Bliss was it, therefore, in that dawn to be alive, and to be a child (oblivious yet of religious history) was very heaven." The embarrassed parentheses guard the happy child from any suspicion that he might not after all be living in the best of times. Meanwhile the reference to Wordsworth's revolutionary fervor works paradoxically to defuse the possibility that anything too unfamiliar might be happening. The years 1688, 1789, and 1986 all bleed together. We have seen this before and this too shall pass, says Wisdom. That kind of sentiment makes Wisdom rather a boring conversationalist.

A fairer idea of wisdom, however, must take account not only of adages but of the penetrating judgment—the sense of what is eternal in human behavior—that distinguishes wise from merely clever people. Rich in experience, the sage perceives each life as an unfolding of universal principles; he is not easily shocked. Thus wisdom understands the individual in terms of the species, the kinship of everyone who shares our common fallen nature. In this sense, too, Mack is an author of wisdom. Though occasionally pained or delighted by something Pope does, he never seems surprised by it; psychology or the context of circumstances always provides an explanation. The enabling act of this biography consists of its understanding of Pope's difference from the rest of us, not as the sign of something extraordinary or unnatural, but as the product of intelligible forces and causes.



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How would a dwarf, a cripple, a Catholic, a poet behave in the early eighteenth century? One might predict he would behave like Pope.

The virtue of such wisdom is its sympathy with the outsider. The danger is that it may explain too much. Pope appears more attractive in this perspective but also more ordinary. Mack is a shrewd and kindly judge of human nature, and a patient interrogator of motives. Yet somehow the poet who emerges in this book does not seem as interesting as his friends had supposed. Too often he responds just as a psychologist or wise man would expect. "Men and women who by some mark or other—deafness, blindness, mutilation, a deformity like Pope's or merely a black skin—register with the rest of us as 'different' are almost inevitably, modern studies tell us, more self-conscious than we 'normals' about being on parade, tend therefore to become acute observers of our responses to them and thus more situation-conscious, more detached, more studied in their own responses than the normal person needs to be." This thoughtful analysis clarifies one of the genuine problems of Pope's character, his scheming sincerity or artless cunning. But the awkward stutter on "we 'normals'" or "the normal person" (repeated elsewhere) indicates Mack's discomfort with the possibility that some standard of the normal might exist to which Pope did not measure up. It seems that readers must be warned not to think themselves superior to the poet. Yet many readers have probably been troubled by something else—a suspicion that Pope is smarter and better than they are.

The specter of abnormality returns at the end of the book. Several accounts of Pope's last days refer to the hallucinations that seem to have swarmed around him—Apollo quitting his head to take up residence in another writer's; a great arm coming out of the wall; or a vision that made him exclaim "Look at Jesus there! How ill they have crucified him!" Mack's reaction is interesting: he tries to *explain* the visions. Was Pope actually looking at a painting of Jesus? None can be traced to Chiswick, where the apparition occurred (in any case, Horace Walpole tells the story to illustrate that Pope was "not in his senses"). Mack judiciously weighs the evidence and concludes that "the remark must continue to

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stand, I am inclined to think, with its mysteries unresolved—these being, after all, no greater than those of the mind itself; or of what becomes of it, or it becomes, on its way to the undiscovered country from whose bourn no traveler returns." Wise reflections, these, but not much to the point. What sort of reader would require a factual, logical gloss on why a dying poet might see Jesus in the air? Perhaps a fanatically normal reader, distrustful not only of people who are "different," but of imagination itself. Often this seems to be the reader for whom Mack is writing.

The distrust of imagination also threatens to spread to the biographer. Like almost any richly detailed life of an artist, this book accumulates many facts that subtly modify or disenchant the visions that the artist has created. Superimposed on the actual Windsor Forest or the London literary world, *Windsor Forest* and *The Dunciad* shine forth as bright illusions, deliberate and sometimes fanciful constructions of the artist's mind. The poet's world is not the real one. A weak biography might treat this effect as a scandal and set out to expose the artist's lies. A strong biography would be more likely to interest the reader in the process of transformation, the fascinating workshop of creation where worlds are forged together. Mack is a strong biographer and a lover of poetry, and he knows how artists work. Yet his need to justify and explain the workings of Pope's mind, to make his art seem normal, sometimes reduces the poet's visions to simulacra of the common day. Some of the bloom wears off *The Rape of the Lock*, for instance, when Mack climaxes his discussion by bringing in the Blounts. One sister, Teresa, displayed on her white shoulder a beautiful dark curl—in fact, a lock. "What is equally clear, in my view, is that the poem's deep currents of affection and sexual attraction, not to mention its finely observed particulars both teasing and admiring, owe as much to its author's personal experience of the sparkling young women at Mapledurham as to his imagination."

Well, yes and no. Certainly the poet could not have conceived the poem if he had never met and watched and been attracted by *some* young woman. Experience counts for something. But anyone can have similar experiences, and not anyone is capable of writing a *Rape of the Lock*. The poem is wise and full of observation, but Pope's imagination is what makes it sparkle. Perhaps Mack's long immersion in the data of the poet's life, his deeds and gardens and acquaintances and sources and manuscripts, has accustomed him to think of Pope as familiar, like an old friend or idea one takes for granted. Yet friends can turn against one, and ideas lose their power. The brilliance of Pope's wit, his unique poetic gift, is not at all familiar; there is nothing else quite like it in all of poetry. This book tends to dispel that sense of uniqueness.

The trouble with wisdom might be put in another way. Both its aspects, as I have defined them, seem characteristic of Pope as well as of Mack, and Mack may well have learned his wisdom partly from living so long with such a wise poet. Familiar quotations enliven all of Pope's writing. A long essay or short book could be written on just one example, the *fiat lux* (Let there be light!) that serves him as the text of his artistic faith, the God-given ability to make something out of nothing. Indeed, allusion—as Reuben Brower showed long ago—might be regarded as the essence of Pope's art. The poet quotes and dresses up and polishes the pick of earlier verse until he makes it shine. Moreover, no one tried harder than Pope to understand his own life and the lives of others in terms of universal principles, the common lot of man (if not perhaps of woman). Even the practice of imitation—translating an epistle or satire of Horace not only into modern English verse but into the foibles and fashions of modern English life—encouraged an eighteenth-century poet to perceive the continuity of enduring human nature in widely separated times and places. Pope turns the great poets of the past into contemporaries, a club of wits who endlessly converse about people whom all of them know: the proud, the weak, the foolish, and the good. All times are ultimately one. When Mack associates the yearning for pastoral with communes and blue jeans, therefore, or when he lumps *The Dunciad* together with the worlds of the Biblical prophets and *The Divine Comedy* and *King Lear* and *The Waste Land*, he is following in Pope's footsteps.

Yet he also smudges the trail. Pope's allusions are nothing if not pointed; they do not bring on nods of recognition, but the shock and dazzle of a fresh perspective. After *The Rape of the Lock*, the epic would never look



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quite the same again. Similarly, if the wisdom of *An Essay on Man* depends on telling us what we already know, its energy depends on matching established truth against the new implications of an expanding universe, the discovery of unknown species, and radical changes in the science of human nature. The challenge was exciting, and so was the precision of Pope's thought. Mack understands this very well. Yet much of his tone, considering the challenge, seems weary and defensive. "Poems in the genre of the *Essay* are not, as the saying goes, our thing." Evidently something has gone wrong with wisdom. On the witness of this book it has lost its sense of discovery, its capacity for joy. It sounds more like a professor than a poet.

According to Samuel Johnson, the special mark of Pope's genius was "a mind active, ambitious, and adventurous, always investigating, always aspiring; in its widest searches still longing to go forward, in its highest flights still wishing to be higher." Mack trims the poet's wings. When he compares Pope's death to the fall of Icarus (no prizes for catching the reference), it seems just right to evoke the victim of art rather than the old master himself. But Daedalus is missing from the picture. Such craftsmen do not need our sympathy; they know what their goals as artists are and how to reach them. Pope got where he was going. This is a grand, compassionate biography, the best we have of Pope. But for the genius of the poet, we must still look higher.

## La Crème

CHOOSING ELITES. *By Robert Klitgaard. Basic Books. $19.95.*

Reviewed by ANDY STARK

In the early eighties, I had several friends who were attending Harvard Law School, and since, as is well known, the elite among the Law School student body is signified by membership on the *Harvard Law Review*, my friends were almost all anxious to get on it. For years, there had been only one route to membership: first-year law school grades. On the basis of one's academic performance as registered on exams set and marked by a handful of professors—and only on that basis—was membership on the *Law Review* awarded. Then, in the early seventies, without closing this route to membership, the *Law Review* added another. Those who did not make the cut on the basis of their spring grades during their first year could enter a "writing competition" in the fall of their second year. The writing competition consisted of two editorial tasks that to a large degree recapitulate the job of a *Law Review* member—editing an article and writing a brief report or analysis of a legal issue, known as a "Note." These submissions were judged, not by a few faculty members, but by the members of the *Law Review*. Some of my friends who did not make *Law Review* on grades did make it on the writing competition.

Oddly enough, or so I thought, my friends, who had never known a Harvard Law School in which the writing competition was not an established way to the top, nevertheless made a distinction throughout their careers between those who had made *Law Review* on "grades" and those who had made *Law Review* "in second year." The distinction was invidious. Despite the broadening, the pluralizing, the opening up, the "elite" remained those who had made *Law Review* on grades alone.

Why did the writing competition not "take"? After all, it is judged by the entire community to which application is being made. It also measures only those qualities of the individual strictly necessary to the tasks to be performed and permits every other personal quality to remain as invisible as its irrelevance deserves. It is an eminently democratic method of choosing membership. Making the *Law Review* by grades, in contrast, has a distinctly aristocratic air. Because grades are awarded by professors who have very different, some would say incommensurate, understandings of the law and who are protected from any kind of scrutiny from the broader community, they are intensely subjective. These professors make their assessment of elite membership by measuring, not those specific editorial and academic qualities

ANDY STARK is a policy advisor to the Prime Minister of Canada. His writing has appeared in the *Public Interest*, the *New Criterion*, the *Wall Street Journal*, and other publications.



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that will make the best law review member, but rather those that will make the best lawyer—arguably, a quite different set of skills. Certainly, the two are not identical.

Nevertheless, it is better to make law review on grades, and some of the reasons why are made clear by the analysis in Robert Klitgaard's *Choosing Elites*. His book is one of the most comprehensive theoretical and empirical examinations ever undertaken on choosing an elite from the "right end of the tail"—that is, from among the most promising candidates. Klitgaard explores with considerable insight such questions as the relative merits of academic and nonacademic measures of scholastic potential; whether tests or alumni or professors are best able to discern it; and whether each university should concern itself with competing with the others for the best available applicants, or whether it should see itself as participating with other universities in composing the best possible national elite—in which case universities might use different admissions policies.

What is most striking about Klitgaard's approach is that all of these debates are internal to a belief that elites should be chosen on merit; they resolve simply into questions of how to form the best elite. Interestingly, not nearly as much attention is paid by Klitgaard to that other debate that has so preoccupied those in the elite-choosing business in the last decade or so—namely, the one in which the whole idea of admissions on merit is challenged in the name of affirmative action, or admissions on the basis of group representation. Klitgaard's de-emphasis of that debate is deliberate. He declares that the "debate over whether or not to have preferential treatment [is] moot in practice" and lacking in "progress toward resolution at the philosophical level." Whatever truth there is to these assertions, Klitgaard at least makes a good case for the relative aridness of this debate by fashioning several far more fascinating ones within the general presumption that elite membership should be awarded on merit alone.

When one draws together the various strands of analysis in *Choosing Elites*, these debates essentially coalesce into one: that between what Klitgaard calls (after David Riesman) "democratic meritocracy" and "aristocratic meritocracy." Democratic meritocracy is the method of choosing applicants wholly on the basis of their performance on test scores of verbal, analytic, and mathematical ability. Test scores are democratic, according to Klitgaard, because they are open to public scrutiny, objective in the sense that everyone must pass the same test, communitarian in the sense that they measure an applicant's suitability for the purposes of the particular community at hand, and blind to irrelevant personal differences. Aristocratic meritocracy, by contrast, "tends to disparage tests, and to put its faith instead in the unarticulated judgment of men who are satisfying each other and their own consciences." This is exemplified in the case of college admissions when professors and alumni are used to interview prospective applicants. The choosing process of aristocratic meritocracy is thus closed to any real public scrutiny; indeed, it may be too subjective even to be communicated. The choosers, successful in society at large, look for their young selves, not for that more confined range of qualities suitable to academic success. And consequently, aristocratic meritocracy has the smell of a self-perpetuating fraternity, and, yes, of an aristocracy. *Choosing Elites*, then, asks and then attempts to answer this question: If democratic meritocracy is a more reliable and in many ways a more attractive method of choosing elites, why does aristocratic meritocracy retain such a strong following, as it does, for example, among Harvard law students?

Klitgaard elucidates four popular contemporary criticisms of democratic meritocracy that help explain the situation. The gist of the first two is, simply, that democratic meritocracy is not all that democratic. Quoting Weber, Klitgaard observes that "democracy fears that a merit system and educational certificates will result in a privileged caste." The idea that there is little more an individual can do about his academic talents than he can do about his bloodline—indeed, about any substantive qualities of personality—has some ascendancy today, thanks in no small part to the debate surrounding John Rawls's celebrated *Theory of Justice*.

Second, it is not the case that democratic meritocracy *meritocratically* measures only the academic skills—the verbal, the analytic, the mathematical—by test, while *democratically* dismissing all irrelevant aspects of personality, such as "goodness or loyalty or en-



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ergy or passionate concern." Rather, it is closer to the idea of democratic meritocracy to believe that all qualities of personality, not just the narrowly academic, are relevant to success at university, but that to measure academic skills through educational testing gives a pretty fair indication of an individual's other personal qualities. Though he leavened it with his usual reasoned skepticism, Learned Hand gave voice to this assumption in 1922:

> If anyone could devise an honest test for character, perhaps it would serve well. . . . Short of it, it seems to me that students can only be chosen by tests of scholarship. . . . If so, it will, I suppose, take its chance that in learning lies the best hope, and that the company of scholars will prove better than any other company.

The notion that performance on a very few verbal, analytic, and mathematical tests can, in any way, disclose the innermost aspects of one's personal qualities or character is not an understanding of the individual that we immediately recognize as democratic. Yet it is the understanding that underlies democratic meritocracy.

Two other criticisms have been directed at testing in recent times; these question not its democratic but its meritocratic presumptions. In the first place, it is no news to testers that their tests are crude. As Klitgaard portrays it, we are still in the very early stages of the science of the "measurement of man," and we have decades of refinement ahead of us. But the very notion of the refinement and growth of meritocratic criteria is self-undermining, for the more prolonged the revision, the less confidence there will be at each successive stage in the existing standard, and the greater the anticipation of further correction. Ironically, confidence in meritocracy wanes as it approaches realization. In the year I took the Graduate Record Exam, for example, an Analytic section had been added for the first time to those two old mainstays, the Verbal and the Mathematical. It made one wonder, first, about that large area of ability, now acknowledged to be relevant to elite selection, that had gone unmeasured when previous elites were chosen, and second, about what still remained unmeasured.

A final criticism of academic tests is that they can be cribbed, crammed, and memorized for so that, in certain cases, all they test is an individual's acumen at being tested. Adducing the proliferation of books and courses on how to take exams as evidence, Klitgaard argues that academic tests do not wholly measure even academic merit, let alone a raft of other deeper, more elusive personal qualities. Some testing services, like the GMAT, which is given to business-school applicants, have dealt with this problem by randomly giving applicants at each sitting different tests—some with a preponderance of verbal questions, others with a preponderance of mathematical questions—presumably in an effort to render futile the attempt to study for them. Yet it is clear that this effort at reconnecting test performance with academic ability is bought at the expense of a good deal of the standardized objectivity and fairness that such exams boast. In other words, meritocracy is bought at the expense of democracy.

Although Klitgaard has undoubtedly hit upon the reasons why there is a current disaffection with democratic meritocracy, it is also true that, to a large degree, they refute one


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another. For if the standard of academic merit is always changing, growing ever more refined, constantly admitting new criteria, then it is reasonable to expect that, over time, a greater and greater raft of personal qualities will have their day. Meritocracy's incoherence over the long run means that no caste will ever undemocratically dominate in perpetuity. None of us may have had any say over our own talents and characteristics, but more and more of them will become portals into the elite. It is not an exaggeration to say that the addition of the analytic test on the Graduate Record Exam enfranchised a new group of graduate students.

In a similar way, the possibilities for manipulating the testing system afforded by the currently imperfect state of meritocratic testing, and exploited by the exam prep courses, will frustrate democratic meritocracy's undemocratic presumption of being able to gauge entire personalities on the basis of test scores. That one can score much higher on a test than would be justified by his academic ability—simply by learning how to take tests—gives those with goals and aspirations that do not match their arbitrary endowment of talents and abilities a democratic chance to gain a measure of fulfillment that would otherwise elude them if meritocracy functioned to ruthless perfection. The ability to deceive the tester into believing that one has verbal, mathematical, and analytical abilities of a certain level, when one really hasn't, may correct for the dubiousness of the tester's belief that verbal, mathematical, and analytical abilities signify that broader range of personal qualities necessary to succeed at university.

Embattled though it is, democratic meritocracy will be objectionable only to the extent that it becomes perfected—fixed, at its end state, convinced that its criteria are insuperable and that it is incapable of errors in determining those who pass them. But in all other cases, it seems, meritocracy's imperfections are democracy's ameliorations. A defense of an idea that relies on its imperfections is a tepid one, so, despite that defense, Klitgaard is right to find dissatisfaction with democratic meritocracy as a method of elite selection. But wherein lies the appeal of aristocratic meritocracy?

Klitgaard attempts an answer in the closing pages:

> Those faculty members who serve on admissions committees enjoy interviewing candidates, and this may induce them to undertake the other burdens of serving. Alumni interviewers may gain a sense of participation in the life of the institution. As one admissions official said, "Interviews involve a wider group of people in the process." . . .
>
> For these reasons it may be appropriate that admissions committees struggle with subjective but also collective judgments, instead of routinizing those judgments into formal decision rules. Choosing elites may have some of the attractive qualities of a ritual, where students, faculty, administrators and alumni contribute their views about the ideal student and the ideal class. Perhaps at universities like Harvard, the selection process should ultimately be one generation of the institution selecting the next, using as much discernment as the university has been capable of passing on.

Klitgaard concludes that aristocratic meritocracy appeals, not because anyone believes that "aristocrats" run a more competent meritocracy than do democrats, but because most members of an institution's community take an intensely democratic view of their aristocracy. Aristocratic meritocracy denotes "involvement," "participation," "service," not imperiousness, arbitrariness, privilege. But most important, aristocratic meritocracy embodies a particular democratic opportunity more stellar than that afforded even by democratic meritocracy, an opportunity that is afforded only by the merger of a meritocratic system of desert with an aristocratic system of rewards. Anyone, on merit, can win that ultimate opportunity—that of determining, at any given level of the elite, the next generation of that level. It is an opportunity that law professors cherish and that, paradoxically, those at the very pinnacle of the law—the justices of the U.S. Supreme Court—have often coveted.

As described by Klitgaard, aristocratic meritocracy's democratic redolence is not enough to explain its popularity among Harvard law students. After all, at the level of the law review, they prefer allowing others to choose the next generation of the elite. Aristocratic meritocracy at this level can be explained only by the fact that these students have noted that the aristocrats of legal life—the Supreme Court justices, the U.S. Attorneys, the professors who matriculated at Harvard—all began their ascents by making law review based on grades, and those students believe that the same path is open to



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them. Indeed, just as he believes opportunity would be denied him were he not allowed ultimately to choose the next elite, so does the law student feel that his accomplishment would be diminished were he not to ascend on the same narrow criterion of the last elite. He is not interested in the law review except as a step to higher elites—clerkships, professorships, judgeships—so that the desire for peer validation of his editorial capacities is overcome by a democratic restlessness that quests for the earliest possible validation from a higher elite on more important capacities. He prefers to give up some fairness in his being chosen initially in order to preserve for himself the right to choose later.

Klitgaard's illuminating *tour de force* leads the reader to understand the appeal of the two contemporary leading philosophies of elite selection, and he does so in the clearest and most thorough exposition yet composed on this subject. Democratic meritocracy, we learn, is defensible to the extent that there exists a gap between the ideal and the reality of meritocracy. Aristocratic meritocracy is appealing precisely when no gap is observed between the ideal and the reality of democratic mobility.

## Riotous Stuff

THE CONTENTIOUS FRENCH: FOUR CENTURIES OF POPULAR STRUGGLE. *By Charles Tilly. Harvard University Press. $25.*

Reviewed by MICHAEL BURNS

Land of revolution and fierce independence, of Robespierre and de Gaulle, the Terror and May '68, France has raised quarrelsomeness to a high art. Polemics and contention are so inextricably linked to our conventional view of the French experience, to continuing stereotypes of national character, that the main title of Charles Tilly's book hardly needed the modifier.

Nineteenth-century historians, novelists, and social psychologists depicted popular insurrections, past and present, as explosions of mass hysteria, the bloodthirsty expression of crowds driven by some demonic force into acts of unbridled rage. Accounts of the Bastille, the barricades of 1848, the sanguinary days of the Paris Commune, or the desperate conflicts between miners and forces of order in the coal fields of northern France were scenes of anarchy, portraits of rebels drunk with violence. The primary tone was, of course, red. After all, revolutionaries surging through Paris streets waving pikes adorned with the heads of their oppressors, and fin-de-siècle terrorists hurling bombs into restaurants and the Chamber of Deputies, provided abundant evidence for literati and police agents alike. Twentieth-century chroniclers of industrial strikes and political *manifestations* changed the style of reportage but not the basic model of protest; to a great extent they continued to treat popular struggle, as Charles Tilly puts it, as a "consequence of anxiety, or of anger, or of ideology." Across generations, observations on conflict in Paris and the provinces have had more than a little in common with recent shorthand analyses of uprisings in Tehran or the Punjab: mass demonstrations are expressions of public disorder, and the crowd is synonymous with chaos.

But not for Charles Tilly. Few historians are more familiar with the rich qualitative and quantitative material on popular protest, and no scholar has spent more hours in more French archives in search of the causes behind collective actions. To the computerized armory of the modern sociologist—the graphs and tables of cyclical economic crises and numbers of protestors—Tilly adds the tools of the traditional historian: the rebel's manifesto, the journalist's editorial, the narrative reports from police spies and local functionaries. From his masterful study of revolution in western France *(The Vendée)*, through a series of collaborative works *(Strikes in France; The Rebellious Century)*, and numerous articles on how protest "modernized," Tilly has revised our view of contention by probing how and why "riot," "sedition," "mutiny," and other "powerholders' words" obscure the logic, limits, and long traditions of popular struggle. If the historian's charge is to make sense of the seemingly senseless, to weave a coherent story from disparate threads, Professor Tilly has applied his formidable talents to

MICHAEL BURNS teaches modern European history at Mount Holyoke College and is the author of *Rural Society and French Politics: Boulangism and the Dreyfus Affair.*



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the perfect subject and met the challenge on many fronts.

The result of more than a decade of labor, *The Contentious French* asks a narrow but critical question: "From the seventeeth century to the present, how did the development of capitalism and the concentration of power in the national state affect the ways that ordinary people contended—or failed to contend—for their interests." Every region of France would reveal telling variations on that central theme, but the documentation would be massive and the final tome unwieldy. Instead, Tilly has chosen five representative areas with vastly different political, religious, and economic traditions in which to explore how capitalism and the state changed "repertoires" of contention over time: Flanders along the northern frontier; Burgundy in the east; Anjou to the west; the large province of Languedoc comprising much of the western Mediterranean coast and its hinterlands; and the Île-de-France, the region of Paris.

In the centuries spanning the Bourbon regime of Henry IV and the Socialist experiment of François Mitterrand, the "interests, opportunities and organization" of ordinary people—a trinity that Tilly stresses repeatedly—changed with the penetration of state influence and with local transformations of capitalism, with the move from cottage industry to large-scale textile production in Flanders, for example, or the commercialization of agriculture in Anjou or winemaking in Burgundy, and so on. With those changes came new modes of protest. In the seventeenth century, provincial aristocrats often united with commoners in opposition to the crushing taxation of the crown. But after Louis XIV and his ministers managed to "check, co-opt, replace or liquidate most of their regional rivals," after the court was domesticated, ordinary people were left to their own devices and to their own defenses.

If the "purse," as Tilly puts it, was the main focus of protest in the seventeenth century, the "loaf" was the grand problem of the eighteenth. The state's need to provision troops, the growth of cities, and the influence of an expanding national market economy directed by a developing coalition of capitalists and state authorities applied pressure on communities to surrender grain reserves; and at times when hard winters led to bad harvests, local folk responded by demanding a fair price for bread or by seizing the grain needed for survival. Though ignited by different sparks in different regions, bread "riots" followed similar patterns and aimed to achieve similar goals. Here, as elsewhere, Tilly offers dramatic proof that most protests were not blind upheavals but calculated attempts to preserve the ancient traditions of a moral economy, to protect the communal rights of the poor. If people took "the law into their own hands," it was the law of the Lord's Prayer buttressed by centuries of village custom, and it was threatened by profiteers from without and from within.

The struggle over marketed food was the major cause of conflict from the 1690s through the first decades of the nineteenth century, and Tilly's evidence provides a corrective to that cottage industry of "crisis theories" that points to the end of the Thirty Years' War, the failure of the Fronde, and the successful location of authority in Louis XIV's state as a moment of "resolution" and a return to "calm." The Sun King may have relaxed during the decades on either side of 1700, but many of his subjects were starving, and crises over grain supplies continued for more than a century.

In the battle for daily bread, the front line was dominated, more often than not, by women. Long before the celebrated events of October 1789, when several thousand market women marched from Paris to Versailles to demand bread and justice from the king and queen ("the Baker and the Baker's wife"), other women were confronting local authorities throughout France and paying the price for their contention. In 1747 in Toulouse, "women of the city's dregs," as one official called them, attempted to protect the local grain supply just as two thousand women in Dijon's central market had done three decades before. In 1708 the forces of order in Anjou made an example of another rebellious woman by having her whipped, "branded with the *fleur-de-lis,* and banished for life." Like Russian women protesting in Saint Petersburg in the early years of the twentieth century, or Senegalese wives and mothers demanding bread for their families in the hard times following de-colonization, French women have been pivotal actors in national revolutions and local insurrections, familiar and forgotten, over the past three centuries.



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Among the many strengths of Tilly's account is his understanding of the crucial importance of the long view—the isolated events that led up to and surrounded the Fronde, the 1789 Revolution, 1848, or May 1968—and his recognition of the vast and variegated assembly of protestors.

The critical moment of change in repertoires of contention, says Tilly, came in the mid-nineteenth century with the "swing away from the defense of local interests against expansion of the state and of capitalism, toward popular efforts to organize around interests on a relatively large scale and to seize some control over the state and over the means of production." Like the old style of tax rebellion, grain seizures virtually disappeared, replaced by the new patterns and locales of contention that would mark the twentieth century—by strikes, electoral campaigns, organized demonstrations by special-interest groups, and more. Proletarianization, urbanization, the concentration of industry, and the continuing growth of the state had a decisive effect on the interests, opportunities, and organization of ordinary people, and, once again, changed their ways of contending.

Tilly's final chapters examine this transition and survey collective actions of the twentieth century, from the massive strikes of 1906–7, through the troubles of the interwar years and the contentious gatherings of the contemporary era. In its basic outlines, it is a story he has told before: through the 1850s, contention had a "parochial scope," a local emphasis, expressed through inter-village fights, Mardi Gras encounters, charivaris, artisans' brawls, and other age-old rituals of protest—the customary channels of conflict. But a "definite shift" to the new, national repertoires had "become complete" by mid-century. "What do the archives tell us?" asks Tilly, and his answer is that "the dossiers of the Third Republic contain . . . almost no trace of that once flourishing ritual [charivari] in either its moral or political form."

But the archives contain many traces, at least in rural regions of Gascony, Normandy, Champagne, Dauphiné, and Savoy, where local and national issues were still fought out in the 1880s and 1890s in the context of kinship rivalries during Mardi Gras and "firebrand" festivals, and in the dead of night in the midst of raucous and frightening charivaris. Such popular expressions were moribund, to be sure, and occurring contemporaneously with strikes and electoral rallies; and by the early years of our century the majority of French men and women had chosen the modern repertoires of protest. But the rural habits that Tilly dismisses as "antique" persisted with a kind of dogged defiance through the fin de siècle, confirming what the author of *The Contentious French* knows so well about other times in other, mostly urban and industrial, locales: that ancient customs, like the memories that maintain them, do not disappear in a decade but resonate into the future; that the French never march in unison; and that their land, like their patterns of contention, is a rich territory of exceptions.

## A Piece of the Rock

THE OXFORD DICTIONARY OF POPES. *By J. N. D. Kelly. Oxford University Press. $24.95.*

Reviewed by HEINZ R. KUEHN

To the encyclopedic mind it may come as little surprise that a publisher who has brought us *The Oxford Book of Dreams* and *The Oxford Book of Death* has now added a dictionary of popes to its vast collection of dictionaries. What *is* surprising about this book is one's sudden realization, after a quick random sampling of some of its entries, that this is a dictionary everybody has been waiting for. I for one, a Roman Catholic with a background in history and the humanities, felt compelled to exclaim—slightly modifying the traditional proclamation of a newly elected pope—"Habemus dictionarium paparum!"

A hyperbolic statement? Judge for yourself. If you are merely an aficionado of dictionaries, this one excels in the category of such books. Instead of listing the popes alphabetically, Dr. Kelly, the editor-author, and his publisher had the wisdom to subjugate dictionary form to this dictionary's function, that is, to list the names chronologically and thereby satisfy the

HEINZ R. KUEHN is director of special educational projects for the American College of Surgeons and the author of several books and numerous articles on philosophical, literary, and historical subjects.



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need, so vital for a subject such as this, to show continuity, context, and development. An alphabetical index of names, with page references to the individual entries, appears in the front of the book, and an exhaustive subject index in the back. Moreover, besides listing the standard reference works he has used, Dr. Kelly has appended to each entry a select bibliography with references to the primary sources for the pope's life and official acts.

If you are a linguist, you will enjoy this dictionary simply for the elegance and precision of its prose, and for the handling of an overwhelming mass of material that masterfully turns each entry into a self-contained, eminently readable vignette. If you are a historian, amateur or professional, look up your favorite epoch—the Renaissance, for example, or the Age of Enlightenment—and you will find some splendid nuggets that will surprise you even if you are a specialist in that era. If you are interested in the history of ideas or art, look up the subject index and let yourself be led to the acts of men and of an institution that for the last two thousand years have profoundly influenced, indeed often shaped, the course of mankind's thinking and feeling, and the artistic and scholarly expression of both, in the West and in the East. And even if you have a penchant for nothing more refined than the creeping and crawling things in the murky subterranean vaults of history, a brief excursion into almost any period of the papacy will titillate your imagination pleasantly. The old axiom that man is a being at once moral and corrupt finds striking verification in the pages of this dictionary.

Yet this book fills a gap in the literature about an institution that had its origin in the New Testament accounts naming the Apostle Peter the "rock" on which Christ will build his Church and who is to be the shepherd of his sheep. No matter how much the authenticity and meaning of these accounts are still being debated today by Christians of all persuasions, including Roman Catholics, one of the merits of this dictionary is that it shows, without any attempt at apologetics, how impressively consistent has been the post-biblical development of the Petrine Office with the thrust of the New Testament texts. John Kelly, an Anglican priest and distinguished historian, classicist, and theologian who accompanied the then Archbishop of Canterbury, Michael Ramsey, on his historic visit to Pope Paul VI in 1966, says in the preface to his book that in telling the story of each pope—and anti-pope—"my consistent object has been to portray them all with cool but not unsympathetic detachment." This laudable detachment explains the poignancy with which the story of the oldest continuing institution in the West unfolds and this account's refreshing difference from the usually partisan works about this subject.

What an incredible, almost awesome story it is. This is a dictionary that can be read from cover to cover. It begins with Peter's prominent role in the nascent Church, his martyrdom in Rome, and the claim of subsequent Roman bishops to be the successors to the apostle and thereby to have primacy over all other regional and local bishops. Yet this claim immediately becomes for some five hundred years one of the main issues causing often violent discord within the Church and provoking untold manipulations and pressures by temporal forces from without. Not until Leo I (440–461), one of only two popes named "the Great," did Rome's primacy become fully explicit and achieve recognition on a hitherto unrealized scale. "An energetic and purposeful pontiff," writes Dr. Kelly, "Leo infused all his policies and pronouncements . . . with his conviction that supreme and universal authority in the church, bestowed originally by Christ on Peter, had been transmitted to each subsequent bishop of Rome as the Apostle's heir."

The second "Great," Gregory I (590–604), a monk who, when elected pope, "genuinely recoiled from the promotion" and "was consecrated under protest," nevertheless turned out an "exceptionally vigorous and confident pontiff whose reign was decisive for the subsequent history of the church." Decisive because he and his successors, some of whom were anything but great, ushered in the medieval papacy that saw the conversion of the Anglo-Saxons, the initiation of close ties between the Church and the Germanic people, and the founding of the papal states—a thorny and often bloody issue up to the end of the nineteenth century. Perhaps more important for the subsequent history of Europe, this period was characterized by the withdrawal of the Church from the political and spiritual



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influence of the Eastern Roman Empire, a development that reached its dramatic climax in the crowning of Charlemagne as Emperor of the West by Leo III (795–816).

From now on, the question of temporal versus spiritual power and rights, centered on the issue of who should install and control bishops, governs the relationship between "throne and altar," with changing fortunes on either side. Gregory VII (1073–1085), "acknowledged generally as one of the greatest popes and most impressive figures of the medieval world," was deposed by a synod of German bishops convened by King Henry IV of Germany because of the effectiveness of the pope's program to abolish royal control of bishops. Gregory in turn excommunicated the king who then sought absolution in penitential garb at Canossa in north Italy, a city whose name became for centuries symbolic in European literature for denoting abject submission to the Church. The reign of Innocent III (1198–1216), "a man born to rule" who "had an exalted conception of his position as Vicar of Christ . . . 'set midway between God and man,'" marks the climax of the medieval papacy, a period distinguished by impressive spiritual, social, and political achievements, but short-lived. Becoming increasingly dependent on and subservient to French politics, the popes were finally forced into the humiliating and, for the Church, devastating seventy years' "Babylonian captivity" in Avignon, France (1309–1376).

At the election of the first pope to reign again from Rome, "the conclave in the Vatican . . . was held amid scenes of unprecedented uproar. Dreading the election of a Frenchman and the return of the papacy to Avignon, excited crowds demonstrated in the streets and even invaded the palace. . . . Next morning rioting broke out afresh, and at a panic-stricken session all but one cast their votes for . . . the archbishop of Bari" who became Urban VI (1378–1389). With Urban, a man "of intransigent obstinacy, violent temper, and determination to assert his rights even beyond what was practicable," begins the Great Schism of the West that, seeing at one time three "sitting" popes or anti-popes, corroded the inner life of the Church and the political stability of Europe and did not end until 1417.

Sixtus IV (1471–1484) ushers in the "line of pontiffs who systematically secularized the papacy" and who became famous (or infamous, if you will) as "Renaissance popes" whose reign is associated with assassinations, intrigues, nepotism, debauchery, the Inquisition, and endless feuds. Yet their alliance with writers, artists, and scholars also made them the strongest cultural force in Europe of that period. Sixtus, for example, who was "strict in his personal life but relentlessly determined and unscrupulous about means . . . transformed Rome from a medieval city into a Renaissance city." Innocent VIII (1484–1492) whose "court was as colorful and loose as any Italian prince's . . . left the papal states in anarchy, and his death was the signal for an outbreak of unprecedented violence and disorder." Alexander VI (1492–1503), a Spaniard whose family name was Rodrigo de Borja and who had fathered Lucrezia Borgia, made a good attempt at reform but "it was soon evident that his consuming passion, gold and women apart, was the aggrandizement of his relatives." Posterity, however, should be grateful to him for persuading Michelangelo to draw plans for the rebuilding of St. Peter's.

The Reformation shatters the religious cohesiveness of Europe, and the sixteenth-cen-


## ANNOUNCEMENT

**The 1987 edition of the N.E.H.** *Overview of Endowment Programs* is now available. The *Overview* describes all the pertinent steps of the Endowment's work for those who are seeking funding for their humanities projects. It includes: program descriptions of the 35 funding areas in NEH; 1987 application deadline dates; data on this year's special emphases and initiatives; a list of state humanities councils' addresses and telephone numbers; and a list of other NEH publications.

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tury popes turn toward reform of the papacy and renewal of the inner life of the Church. As the rising tide of secularism, atheism, absolutism, and nationalism gradually isolates the Church from the political life of Europe, it gains in spiritual vigor and in recognition as a supra-national authority. Yet adaptation to the Age of Enlightenment and the modern world proves difficult. Pius VII (1800–1823), for example, "startled conservatives at Christmas 1797 by declaring in a sermon that there was no necessary conflict between Christianity and democracy." Yet forty years later Pius IX (1846–1878) publishes his "Syllabus of Errors," which denounced "the principal errors of our times," including the view that the pope "can or should reconcile himself to, or agree with, progress, liberalism, and modern civilization." On the other hand, when "Pio Nono" died, writes Dr. Kelly, "he had effectively created the modern papacy, stripped . . . of its temporal dominion, but armed with vastly enhanced spiritual authority in compensation. . . . His reign witnessed a vigorous spiritual regeneration . . . that left the church profoundly changed and strengthened its inner life." Under Pius's successor, Leo XIII (1878–1902), "whose distinctive contribution was the opening up of a dialogue between the church and society in a series of striking pronouncements," begins the resolute and decisive turn of the papacy toward the modern age. Although Leo's successor, Pius X (1903–1914), attempts to thwart this orientation with his suppression of modernism, his successor Benedict XV (1914–1922), "successfully calling a halt to the bitter animosity between diehard traditionalists and modernists," again sets the Church on a course it has followed to this day.

Dr. Kelly has given us a series of fascinating sketches of men elected to an office that, for Catholic believers, holds the keys to the kingdom of heaven yet needs a divine promise that, as Jesus told Peter, "the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." Happily, though, one does not have to be a believer to be moved and impressed. What Dr. Kelly observes about the papacy since John XXIII is true also of this unique dictionary: no matter what you believe, it is bound to capture your imagination.


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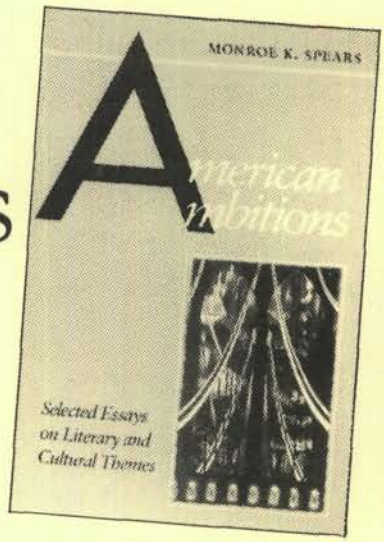


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